


54 9/6

**Aide-de-Camp's Library**



Rashtrapati Bhavan  
New Delhi

Accn. No. 1321

Call No. 711.11

**IN THE FAMILY**

**GIELGUD**  
(1794)  
CAVALRY  
England (1837)

**BENJAMIN TERRY ~ SARAH BALLARD**  
ACTOR ACTRESS

SON OF AN INNKEEPER  
AT PORTSMOUTH  
HAD 14 CHILDREN

**WIS**

**MARION TERRY**  
ACTRESS (D.1930)

**FRED TERRY ~ JULIA NEILSON**  
ACTOR (1863-1933) ACTRESS

**FLORENCE TERRY ~ WILLIAM MORRIS**  
ACTRESS (D.1896) SOLICITOR (D.1934)

**DAME ELLEN TERRY**  
ACTRESS  
(1848 - 1928)

**JAMES CAREW**  
ACTOR

**PHYLLIS NEILSON-TERRY ~ CECIL KING**  
ACTRESS ACTOR

**MABEL TERRY ~ Capt. R. C. BAILEY**  
LEWIS ACTRESS

**DENNIS NEILSON TERRY ~ MARY GLYNNE**  
ACTOR (D.1932) ACTRESS

**FRANK GIELGUD ~ KATE LEWIS**  
STOCKBROKER (Married 1893)

**HAZEL TERRY**  
ACTRESS

**LEWIS GIELGUD**  
ASSIST. SECY. GENERAL  
LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCYS  
IN PARIS. NOVELIST (D.1934)

**VAL GIELGUD ~ BARBARA DILLON**  
BBC DRAMA DIRECTOR  
NOVELIST (B. 1900) ACTRESS

**JOHN GIELGUD**  
ACTOR (B. 1904)

**ELEANOR GIELGUD**  
BUSINESS WOMAN (D.1907)

TARAPORVALA  
"all-soilers"  
"all"







*YEARS OF THE LOCUST*

GOVERNMENT HOUSE  
NEW DELHI.

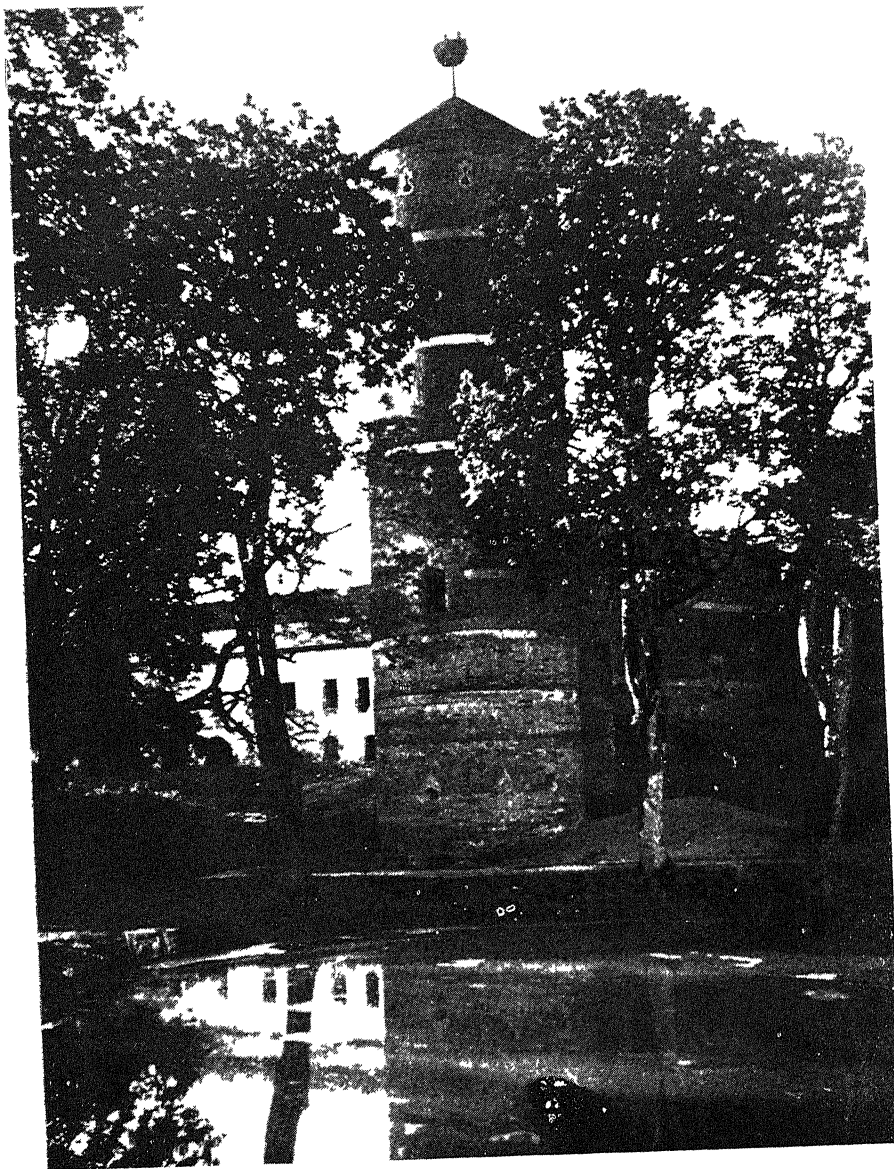


Aide-de-Camp's Library

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In view of the similarity of title, the publishers wish to announce that this book should not be confused with A. S. M Hutchinson's autobiography, *A Year that the Locust*.





ГИЕЛГУДЫС/К/ — 1937

# ***YEARS OF THE LOCUST***

VAL GIELGUD



NICHOLSON & WATSON  
LONDON • BRUSSELS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1947 BY  
NICHOLSON & WATSON LTD.  
26 MANCHESTER SQUARE  
LONDON W.1

*In life it does not matter so much what you do, as what you are.—*

SOMERSET MAUGHAM, *The Circle*.

*These our actors . . .*

*Are melted into air. . . .*

SHAKESPEARE, *The Tempest*.

*for R.*

*who has given to this record,  
with all its omissions and im-  
perfections, a happy ending.*



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD - - - - -	viii
CHAPT.	
I. BEGINNINGS - - - - -	9
II. "GATES OF THE PRISON-HOUSE . . ."	17
III. "LOTUS-EATING" - - - - -	25
IV. INTERLUDE—AN INNOCENT ABROAD—I. POLAND, 1920	33
V. "A POOR PLAYER . . ."	41
VI. ROUND AND ABOUT THE THEATRE - - - - -	52
VII. SAVOY HILL - - - - -	67
VIII. ROUND AND ABOUT THE BROADCAST PLAY - - - - -	75
IX. "BROADCASTING HOUSE" - - - - -	89
X. GENERAL TENDENCIES OF CONTEMPORARY ENTERTAINMENT - - - - -	101
XI. AN INNOCENT ABROAD—2. SWEDEN, GERMANY, HUNGARY - - - - -	111
XII. ROUND AND ABOUT THE CINEMA - - - - -	126
XIII. AN INNOCENT ABROAD—3. HOLLYWOOD—NEW YORK	140
XIV. BROADCASTING IN WARTIME - - - - -	166
XV. STRICTLY PERSONAL - - - - -	182
XVI. ROUND AND ABOUT TELEVISION - - - - -	187
XVII. POLAND—1945 - - - - -	193
ENVOI - - - - -	205

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	PLATES
GIELGUDYSZKY—1937 - - - - -	<i>Frontispiece</i>
HOLLYWOOD—SHIRLEY ROSS AND V.G. - - - - -	1
ELLEN TERRY AT WINCHELSEA - - - - -	2
THE RIVER NIEMEN AND THE ZAMEK OF GIELGUDYSZKY - - - - -	3
'THE RINGER'—WYNDHAM'S THEATRE, 1926 - - - - -	4
'TILLY OF BLOOMSBURY'—B.B.C. AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY, 1928 - - - - -	5
'THE END OF SAVOY HILL' - - - - -	6
BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1937 - - - - -	7
THE DRAMATIC CONTROL PANEL—BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1932 - - - - -	7
'THE MAN BORN TO BE KING' - - - - -	8
ERIC MASCHWITZ AND V. G., BUDAPEST, 1936 - - - - -	9
OUTSIDE THE PARAMOUNT STUDIOS IN HOLLYWOOD - - - - -	10
THE PARAMOUNT ARMOURY - - - - -	11
BLITZ AT BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1941 - - - - -	12
'THE GREAT SHIP'—BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1943 - - - - -	13
'DEATH AT BROADCASTING HOUSE' - - - - -	14
'HUGO' AND 'RUPERT OF HENTZAU' - - - - -	14
TELEVISION—ALEXANDRA PALACE, 1939 - - - - -	15
WARSAW, 1945. THE ROYAL PALACE - - - - -	16

## FOREWORD

THIS book is a collection of personal opinions, of personal prejudices, and of personal reminiscences. I have to apologise for the tiresome consistency with which the letter "I" recurs throughout its length. It was, however, written, not because I am exhibitionist beyond the average of my generation, but because I was asked to do so.

I feel an obligation to emphasise that the British Broadcasting Corporation is in no way responsible for the views herein expressed; that its approval of conclusions that I have drawn, of points of view that I have adopted, should by no means be assumed. I feel that it says something for an organisation too often labelled as inhuman or bureaucratic, that it has been not only possible but agreeable for someone like myself—confessing a weakness for being in a minority of one—to serve it not altogether unsuccessfully for eighteen years.

I should like to express my gratitude to Winifred Ashton and Belle Chrystall, to Michael Joseph and Keneth Adam, who read the book in typescript and initiated valuable 'cuts' and emendations.

Where the record may appear too strictly personal I have included it because I felt that the opinions of a silhouette are unlikely to be either interesting or convincing. I have been so-old-fashioned as to have omitted any account of my love-life. And, *pace* Pontius Pilate, I have tried to tell the truth.

At that I must leave it.

V. G.

## CHAPTER I

## BEGINNINGS

WE are, I suppose, rather an odd family. Most families—even the Forsytes, and those inimitably fictional creations of Miss Dodie Smith's—consider themselves out of the ordinary. But the Gielguds are definitely unusual—which is perhaps not so odd after all, if you care to consider their origin.

Even in a country largely populated by mongrels, their blood is a remarkably mingled stream. My father is Polish on both sides. My mother is a mixture of English, Irish and Welsh—and has an emotional passion for Scotland. A good deal of inaccurate nonsense has from time to time appeared in print about the Polish side of the family. I have been accused, somewhat quaintly, of claiming to be simultaneously a White Russian, a Russian White—which is not the same thing!—a connection of the Romanoffs, and an ex-cavalry officer in the Polish Army. True, there exists to this day in Lithuania a village called from the family name Gielgaudskis. True, that for nearly three hundred years Gielguds lived in the castle, whose ruins still stand on the bluff beside the River Niemen. But in reality the place was less a castle than a largeish fort, built originally in 1346 by the Knights of the Teutonic Order to guard the river-crossing. True, that the name appears in the Polish Golden Book, thereby guaranteeing its social standing. But the Gielguds were neither counts nor princes—and I fear that most of them were on the stupid side.

The most distinguished among them, in comparatively modern times, seems to have been that General Antony Gielgud, who was killed by one of his own men at the disastrous close of the Polish Insurrection against Russia in 1831, after grossly mismanaging his own share of the business. I have seen his miniature. And the long, thin face with its prim narrow forehead does not, I fear, imply intelligence. Certainly his practical record is against him. My own favourite among my Polish forbears is one of whom nothing is known save that he served with the famous *Cheveau-Légers*, the Polish Light Horse of Napoleon's Guard, and was killed in the battle of Haynau in 1813. I ran across his name, quite by chance, in a regimental history which my brother Lewis picked up in Wilno some years ago. That unknown subaltern of my blood—*felix opportunitate mortis*—immediately fascinated me. Knowing nothing of him, I could invent everything. So in 1929 I wrote a novel about him, which, in spite of its determinedly exiguous sales, I still like best of my books.

My Polish grandfather started his life in England as a schoolmaster in Chelsea. Later he became a clerk in the War Office, and simultaneously acted as a correspondent on foreign affairs for various continental newspapers. He wore a beard, was a great walker, and loved a good glass of wine. His handwriting—very similar to mine—was nearly as illegible. Both for him and for my Polish grandmother I had a great weakness, though by the time I had appeared on the scene they had gone to live for the most part in Cracow, where they could keep in close touch with my aunt who had married the Austrian painter Axentowicz. During the Great War they moved from Cracow to Vevey in Switzerland, for they had grandchildren fighting on both sides. The eldest of my first cousins was killed in the Bukovina fighting against the Russians, while my brother Lewis was wounded, fighting against the Germans in France. In our family Poland had been most effectively partitioned in miniature. . . .

My father, who was for fifty years on the London Stock Exchange, is about as much like the average man's idea of a stockbroker as I am like a film-star. My principal recollections of him will always centre about him sitting at his piano, playing quite exquisitely by ear, and incredibly unconscious of the beauty of his hands. I doubt if he has ever quite got over his irritation at my incorrigible obstinacy in maintaining that I could enjoy his playing and read a book at the same time. None the less I did, and still—alas, very occasionally—do. The possessor, so I believe, of a temperament definitely unpractical, he has defeated that temperament's demands successfully all his life. To me he is the embodiment of solvency and commonsense, while fundamentally sceptical of the value of both one and the other. I hasten to add that I am certain that he would disagree flatly with the opinion expressed in that last sentence!

For one thing, among many others, I am profoundly grateful to my father. He never made the mistake of attempting to deny the gulf that inevitably separates the generations. We—I think I can speak for my brothers and sister on this point—respected him accordingly, and loved him none the less because he neither expected us to call him "sir," nor incited us to the use of his Christian name. Mildly cynical by conviction, he has mellowed with increasing years. He still regards such occupations as acting and the writing of novels as perilously insecure, though my brother John's successes have made of acting at least a reputable profession! I shall not easily forget his relief when my own somewhat chequered early career was ultimately deflected behind the walls, and confined within the office hours of the British Broadcasting Corporation. My father has worked "office hours" all his life. Work outside those hours may be all sorts of things. He is never quite convinced that it is work. . . .

It has always seemed to me that my mother has suffered unreason-

ably from having been born the daughter of Kate, the niece of Ellen, Terry. Now she suffers in the same way from being the mother of John Gielgud. She would hotly deny any suffering. But then she is, of all the people I have met, the most consistently self-denying. I prefer to leave my debt to her unspecified in detail. No one who knows her will be fool enough to think that it is unrealised. . . .

No doubt our leaning towards various aspects of the theatre comes from her Terry strain. True, there was a Polish actress of some distinction on my father's side, but I doubt her standing up for a minute against my grandmother Kate Terry and "Aunt Nell." In the eyes of a small boy, at any rate, the latter's charm and genius were equalled by the former's really terrific personality: the terrific aspect of which only finally disappeared when in the fulness of time I realised just how badly she played bridge! Too much—in my view far too much!—has been written of the Terrys for me to write further of that distinguished family. Personally I admire them as much as I fail to understand them. Which no doubt accounts for the fact that, if my brother John is now almost the best actor in England, I was in my time quite certainly the worst. I can, however, claim to have been the only thoroughly bad actor who ever realised how bad he was, and as a consequence took the first opportunity he could to stop acting. . . .

It has been maintained that no one can be a good actor, who is not by nature something of an exhibitionist. This seems to me a needlessly offensive way of putting it. Myself I would substitute "something of a Terry" as the operative phrase, with its connotations of slightly flamboyant temperament, genuine passion for the theatre, capacity largely to ignore the world outside the stage-door, and a queerly instinctive aptitude for the voice, movement, and general traffic of the stage. But of the theatre I hope to write at greater length in subsequent chapters. Enough here to say that the theatre "lay all about us in our infancy." A toy theatre was one of our most cherished toys. We spent an unconscionable amount of time in dressing-up. Even I—who hated going to the theatre because it always gave me a racking headache—could not resist the thrill of being taken "behind" at His Majesty's to see my cousin Phyllis Neilson-Terry all glorious as Queen Elizabeth in *Drake* with a background of two live white horses; nor of my uncle Fred Terry's fencing in the last act of *Henry of Navarre*.

On Christmas Day Marion and Ellen Terry, the latter complete with her spectacles and famous black handbag almost as big as a suitcase, were of the family party round the tree in our drawing-room. And at the age of fifteen, before no less distinguished an audience than G. K. Chesterton, and on the stage of his studio at Beaconsfield, I produced my first play, in which John played the villainess in remarkable sham pearls. The rest of the cast included John Cheatle, later a

colleague of mine at the B.B.C., his sister, and mine. The piece was a deadly serious melodrama freely plagiarised from *Raffles*—and G.K.C. laughed more loudly than I have ever heard anyone laugh before or since!

For myself, however, this theatrical glamour remained as an excitement and a game. For John its reality became very early in life an *idée fixe*—with results that everyone knows. I had neither his talent, nor his strength and determination of purpose. It is possible that—headaches apart—I cherished a certain resentment against the theatre, because it was at a performance of *Peter Pan*—a play I have always disliked—that it was discovered that I had done my best at the age of seven to ruin my eyesight for good. I simply could not see anything on the stage from the dress-circle. It was, of course, entirely my own fault. I had learned to read at the age of four, and never stopped reading thenceforth—for the most part books spread out for convenience on the seat of a chair. In front of this chair I would kneel for hours, my nose in the book. Or I would read under my bedclothes at night with the aid of an electric torch. So the result was hardly surprising. But I fancy that somehow I associated the theatre with having to wear the steel-rimmed spectacles which, together with my omnivorous reading proclivities, were to cause me to be dubbed “Beetle” at my private school.

I cannot, alas, emulate Mr. Compton Mackenzie, in remembering innumerable and fascinating details of my earliest years. Photographs prove that I had golden and very curly hair as a small child, showing how performance belies promise. Family legend relates that I had to be restrained from opening black-beetle traps in the basement and playing with the inmates—hideous presage no doubt of my addiction later in life to the works of Tchekhov. Another story describes my invincible aversion from children’s parties, going even to the length on one shameful occasion of striking my mother, who was trying to lead me to such a party by the hand. I confess I remember neither of these incidents, and I am disposed to believe that taken by and large my childhood was so fortunate as largely to have been made up of that happiness which has no history. . . .

Before my brother John was born we lived at 36 Earl’s Court Square. Of that house I remember only a panel of stained glass which I suspect to have been in the door of the lavatory in the hall. With the increase in size of the family in 1904 we moved to 7 Gledhow Gardens, so that South Kensington remained as the permanent backcloth to our adolescent years. That backcloth’s outstanding features were, I think, the apparently interminable lengths of the Cromwell and Exhibition Roads, and the glittering wavelets of the Round Pond, ploughed as gallantly as any wine-dark sea by my toy yacht *Brynhild*. The Round Pond, alas, seems sadly shrunken to-day in comparison

with what it seemed when transmuted by imagination into the Sargasso Sea or Spanish Main. But the Cromwell Road seems just as endless now as it did to the peering eyes and dragging feet of seven years old.

South Kensington indeed is no longer what it was in its late Edwardian heyday. 7 Gledhow Gardens, like so many of its fellows, is become three flats. One of my pet toy-shops retails, with appropriate irony, wireless sets. Modern block-building and Neon lighting have cropped up about South Kensington Station. And somehow there seem far fewer children than there were, padding with their nurses along Gloucester Road or Queen's Gate *en route* for the old Balloon Woman who once guarded the entry to Kensington Gardens. Maybe it is only that when I pass that way they are nearly all at home listening to the Children's Hour. I find it hard indeed sometimes to convince myself that when I was a child the telephone was both a luxury and something of a mystery, while broadcasting simply did not exist. . . .

7 Gledhow Gardens was a four-storeyed house with a basement. Our special domain was the third floor, cut off from the perils of the staircase in John's tottering days by a delicious miniature gate, which, for some reason, appealed to me enormously. Even in those early days I believe I had a natural leaning towards the splendours of isolation, and that gate may have provided something akin to an illusion of the same. We kept no pets. My mother did not think them healthy in a Nursery, and my father had no use for them downstairs. My mother, incidentally, had a genuine horror of cats, which persists to this day. This may have explained our passion for the Zoo, and my own determination to keep cats at the earliest possible opportunity: one of the few ambitions I have succeeded in gratifying.

For some years John and I shared a bedroom; and there was a revolting instance of schoolboy brutality in my habit of compelling him to go to sleep in my bed when he retired, so as to have the bed warm for me when I arrived later armoured in all the dignity of one who spent more than half his year away from home.

The toy theatre, a magnificent affair of white and gold with a pillared proscenium, was, of course, John's especial domain, though I took a large share in its management, the invention of its plays, and the solemn, if not pompous, writing of its "notices." The latter rather curiously modelled on the style of the late Clement Scott whose *From Bells of King Arthur* we had found in the library, still exist: a singular tribute alike to prophecy and vanity. . . .

But it was in what we called always "the Top Room" that I came into my own: a large room, unfurnished and with bare boards, on the servants' floor, which was given up to me for my lead soldiers. Across those boards, diversified and adorned by all the appurtenances of a clockwork railway, plasticine trench-systems, tiny trees made of



sponge and matchwood, miniature barbed-wire entanglements constructed in hospital by my brother Lewis after Loos, cardboard houses, and plaster forts, manœuvred an army which reached in its prime a strength of nearly 800 rifles and sabres, and some 40 guns. Quite ignorant of the activities of Mr. H. G. Wells—who had engaged some years earlier at Sandwich in this same agreeable exercise in practical *militarismus*—all war's fascination, without destruction, agony, or bloodshed—my brothers and I fought Little Wars *à l'outrance* for days, even for weeks on end.

I am tempted to enlarge upon those extremely happy hours. For John, I fear, they were less happy. Martial glory held little appeal for him. In his nostrils the smell of grease-paint was ever more potent than that of gunpowder. But my sister, Eleanor, seemed only too happy to be released from a humiliating tradition binding her to the adoration of dolls with improbably angelic expressions. Battles drawn up after the picturesque notions of Mr. Caton Woodville's illustrations to the History of the Boer War—complete with gloriously charging cavalry, City Imperial Volunteers making a last stand in slouch hats, red-trousered Zouaves, and galloping guns—made a far greater appeal than even a doll's house with a removable outside. In the toy theatre business I do not think that Eleanor ever achieved a status much beyond that of permanent patron of the Royal Box—under the queer *alias* of "Lady Jones." In the Top Room she could rely on holding at least brigadier's rank, showing an aptitude, typically feminine, for the timing and pressing home of quite devastating counter-attacks against all the rules of tactics and probability alike.

My abiding interest in the Art of War cannot, however, be ascribed wholly to parents who saw nothing inherently corrupting in an almost limitless recruitment of lead soldiers; nor even to H. W. Wilson, G. A. Henty, and the Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World. Indeed I found the latter dull. And I still find it hard to forgive Sir Edward Creasy his inclusion of Marathon at the expense of Plataea. But round about my eighth year I caught measles, and my nurse found in Professor Sloane's "Life of Napoleon" a perfect sedative for a tiresome small boy who was at his most tiresome during convalescence.

I believe Sloane is now considered both out of date and inaccurate. But I think I absorbed more of the genuine background of the Consulate and the Empire from those heavy and profusely-illustrated volumes than ever I did as a history specialist at school. Jéna was not just a French victory over the Prussians, but an unforgettable picture of Murat, bare-headed and armed only with his riding-switch, leading endless squadrons of dragoons and cuirassiers at the charge; the Forty Centuries did in fact look down from the summits of the Pyramids; and the Moscow Retreat meant Ney, his marshal's cocked hat askew, his bulldog jaw set, musket in hand, representing in person the Rear-

guard of the Grand Army against a background of limitless snow and distant Cossack lances. . . .

Napoleon, of course, is nowadays *démodé*. He is remembered as being a bad example to such public nuisances as Hitler and Mussolini, and forgotten as the first would-be practical exponent of the ideal of the United States of Europe. But a small boy was not concerned with Napoleon's ethics. He was simply fascinated by the great captain who rode his white Arab into every capital from Rome to Moscow, and frankly disappointed by the result of Waterloo. . . .

I have occasionally speculated as to my fate, had my eyesight not proved an inexorable barrier against my desire to make the Army my career. My brief experience of military life during the last months of the Great War was not encouraging. I cleaned a rifle badly, and buttons worse. I was semi-blind the moment I put on a gas-mask. My fellow cadets of the Household Brigade Cadet Battalion at Bushey seemed odd and unsympathetic types: they ranged from the toughest colonials to Sir Gerald du Maurier and Sir Walford Selby. And I was frankly terrified by the fact that I was apparently taught next to nothing which seemed likely to help me to bear responsibility for the lives of men older than myself. Fortunately I was never to have to face the actual problem. And probably equally fortunately I got no nearer to the Regular Army than receiving one of the last Special Reserve commissions issued to the Brigade under Great War conditions. Yet to an extent the old longing has persisted. And I value few things more than the Grenadiers' regimental cypher, which the Regiment gave me as a memento of the broadcast of the History of the Grenadier Guards which I had the honour to produce in the autumn of 1938.

I do not wish to convey the impression that our childish days were passed in a continual pretence of being generals or actor-managers. Our parents did us the inestimable service of discouraging "too much ego in our cosmos," and preventing us from believing ourselves to be at all out of the ordinary. They left it to our schools to find out the latter. What they did was to ground us most happily in the type of literature which I hope is still to be found in many nurseries: Beatrix Potter; "Uncle Remus"; E. Nesbit—especially "The Phoenix and the Carpet"; "The Tapestry Room" Henty; "Tom Brown's School-days," appropriately for a future (though he knew it not) Rugbeian; "Just So Stories"—read aloud as they always should be; "Stalky & Co."; W. H. Fitchett—more militarism!; the variously-coloured Fairy Books of Andrew Lang; Church's "Stories from the Iliad and the Odyssey"; Charles Kingsley; a frighteningly illustrated book of Japanese legends; "The Green Adventure Book," including Victor Hugo's superbly fictional account of Waterloo; bound volumes of the *Strand Magazine*, including the original Sherlock Holmes stories and

"Martin Hewitt, Investigator"; and Conan Doyle's "White Company," "The Lost World" and "Exploits of Brigadier Gerard." From these it was a short step to Seton Merriman, Anthony Hope, S. R. Crockett, and John Buchan, and a not much longer step to attempts at emulation. Finally in this connection I must pay my parents one more compliment. I do not remember their taking away or forbidding me to read any book at any time. And I still find pornography dull . . .

In the summer we always used to take a house in the country, usually in one of the south-eastern counties. Of those summer holidays a certain number of snapshots remain—but few detailed memories. I recall what was then the last house on the outskirts of Tadworth, with a view of the Grand Stand at Epsom visible from the garden. It may be that the romance of that view still persists because I have never yet been to Epsom on Derby Day. There was a vicarage at Berkhamsted, in which, I believe, Cowper lived. There were other houses, comparatively featureless, at Cowden, and Uckfield, and Beaconsfield, and Steyning. Is it only the darkening glass of approaching middle-age that seems to give to those summers before the First Great War a background of perpetual sunshine? Or is it that to a family for which sport was almost a non-existent form of occupation—apart from tennis of an obstinately pat-ball standard—the weather was a feature of prime importance in itself?

I collected butterflies in those days. The successful breeding of Puss-Moth caterpillars, the pursuit of various *Vanessae*, competed with the more perilous fascination of assisting gardeners to "take" wasps' nests. I walked a good deal with my Father—more, I fear, than a natural disposition towards physical sloth enjoyed—and copied one of Mr. Wells's heroes in embellishing such walks by surveying the country with what I fondly believed to be a military eye! Every fold of the Downs concealed skirmishing sharpshooters. A battery was permanently in position behind Chanctonbury Ring. The failure to discover any adequate ground for cavalry charges on the grand scale was a source of perpetual dissatisfaction to me. On the other hand I felt that I knew why the Grand Army would never have conquered England, even had it been able to cross the Channel. Murat and Lasalle would never have approved of such a hedged-in countryside . . .

Meanwhile, after the normal experiences of elementary education at a *kindergarten*, and a preparatory school in South Kensington, I found myself sent away from home for the first time at the age of nine to a boarding-school called Hillside, near Farncombe, in Surrey.

## CHAPTER II

### "GATES OF THE PRISON-HOUSE . . ."

My education was what is known as an entirely conventional one. The older I grow, the more firmly I believe that it was none the worse for that. I do not pretend for one moment that my schooldays were the happiest of my life. I am inclined to believe, from experience and observation, that the boy who is very successful and very happy at school, is unlikely in after life to be either one or the other. There is no difficulty in picking holes in normal private and public-school education. But I have yet to be convinced that the various up-to-date substitutes achieve anything much more satisfactory in the way of results.

It is fashionable nowadays to put most people's shortcomings, and actual vices, down to an inferiority complex. In its turn that complex is attributed to inhibitions established during the processes of conventional education. It may be foolishly simple-minded of me, but I still believe that my defects of character and ability arise from a constitutional laziness, a disinclination to face unpleasant facts, a love of the good things of life, and that softness of heart which is inseparable from a certain softness of head! I was not very happy at school. At Rugby I was frankly wretched. I was bullied, and I was beaten, and I was despised. Education was achieved rather by surviving the system than by making proper use of it. But the appreciation of the muddled standards of school-life proved an invaluable introduction to the equally muddled standards of the outside world. It was probably not such a bad thing to experience the extreme of physical and mental misery when very young: it implied a certain sense of proportion concerning happiness and unhappiness when one became grown-up . . .

Hillside was a smallish school of some forty boys. My brother Lewis had been there before me. He had left, Head of the School and an Eton Scholar: a reputation which was far more trouble to me than it was worth! His cleverness was continually being flung in my teeth as a reproach and an incentive. Neither one nor the other could compensate for my determined failure to grasp classical syntax; for my purely mechanical approach to the making of Latin Verses . . .

On the other hand, except for a little mild bullying during my first terms, Hillside—though on the rough and ready side, especially in the matter of food—was a good deal of fun. Never, in any sense of the word, athletic, I scraped the last place in the Soccer and Cricket Elevens before I left. In my turn I became Head of the School, largely owing to my omnivorous reading habits, which gave me an

unfair advantage over my fellows when dealing with such things as General Papers, English Literature, and History. For the first time I experienced Responsibility, and realised what a hollow mockery it can be when not allied to Power. There was an occasion when an unpopular day-boy saw fit to absent himself from watching the most hard-fought match of the year. The following day he was the object of a combined demonstration of physical disapproval from his little playfellows in the changing-room. I was present, but took no part. It had seemed to the arrogance of twelve-years-old that the affair was beneath my dignity. The victim's mother complained to the Headmaster, and I was ceremonially beaten as a scapegoat. My defence—that even if I had wanted to quell the disturbance, I had no real authority to do so—was disregarded. It was my first lesson in the fallibility of human justice.

I have said I was beaten. This statement can be relied upon to rouse astonishing feelings of fury and resentment in many breasts. I believe that in less snobbish educational establishments such a proceeding might well have given cause for my dragging my Headmaster before a magistrate on a charge of assault; for his being pilloried in the cheaper newspapers as a tyrant, or a sadist, or both. I must confess that, once it was over, I never felt very seriously about a beating. I think that we all accepted beatings as a painful but agreeably brief method of wiping out a score. I still believe it to be infinitely preferable to the giving of innumerable lines: a punishment which certainly completed the process of making my handwriting almost entirely illegible, apart from depriving a small boy of fresh air and exercise.

My Headmaster, James Douglas, affectionately known to us as "Puggie," undoubtedly owed something of his prestige to the fact that he played cricket for Middlesex. To the same prowess he probably owed the notable resilience of his wrist! I still remember the thrill of seeing his name in print in a novel of J. C. Snaith's—called, I think, *Willow the King*—with reference to the excellence of his out-fielding. A less romantic figure than his brother, Sholto, who had served in South Africa, and was to be killed in the First Great War, his personality was unquestionable. After thirty years he still seems extraordinarily little changed. At the school at which my own son is—I hope—happier and more scientifically educated than I was at Hillside, "Puggie" continues to play football in the rain, and act as whipper-in on Sunday Walks.

There is, however, one charge which can fairly be levelled against those early schooldays. Oddly enough it has nothing to do with homosexuality or self-abuse. It remained for my public school to introduce me to those refinements of civilisation—and even then without much glamour or success. We were, I fancy, protected by an

invincible armour of ignorance : which may be something of an answer to those who would have babes plied with " the facts of life " almost before they cease to be sucklings. But neither during the holidays nor at school did I achieve the rudiments of fluency in a foreign language. This was the more singular and inexcusable, seeing that both my parents spoke French well, and my father was as inveterate a continental traveller on his holidays as I have come to be myself. I suppose it is impossible to persuade educational authorities, that for practical and pleasurable purposes an ounce of fluency is worth a ton of grammatical accuracy in a foreign country. After all, how much strictly grammatical English does one employ in the course of the average day ? Yet all my life I have been rendered hopelessly self-conscious, devastatingly incapable of any sensible approach to a foreign tongue, by the prejudice hammered into me, over " the pens, ink and paper of my aunt's gardener," that if I could not talk French accurately I had better not talk it at all.

Hillside was, perhaps, rather in advance of its time in the inclusion of a certain amount of acting in its activities. My brother John's earliest semi-public appearances must have been in the rôles of " Humpty-Dumpty " and " Shylock," and I believe that Lewis at the age of twelve, wrung tears from the audience assembled to see him as " Mark Antony " in *Julius Cæsar*. I was a bad actor as a boy, as I am a bad actor now. My position in the school ultimately entitled me to largeish parts. But I blotted my histrionic copybook for good when, before going on to play " Theseus " in the last act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I carefully removed my false moustache while leaving my spectacles firmly in position. I doubt if we learned much about acting. But we were encouraged to think of Shakespeare in terms of the theatre instead of professorial footnotes : a point of view I have done my best to propagate ever since.

I fear I can include no reminiscences of small boys since become celebrated. To the best of my knowledge the only one of my contemporaries to make a figure in the world at large was Ronald Mackenzie, whose untimely death was such a tragic loss to the English theatre. He was three years or so younger than I, and I only remember a shy, queer boy with big, soft eyes and longish, curly hair, who was popularly considered to be rather " a wet," and objected to not being allowed to go for walks by himself. His time at Hillside overlapped both John's and mine, and I feel glad that it was his recollection of our rather odd name which induced him, on seeing it on a London playbill when long after he returned from America, to send his play *Musical Chairs*, to John, and gave him as a result his first taste of success—which was to be so ironically brief after years of struggle.

It was a grave disappointment to my parents when I failed to emulate Lewis's example and win a scholarship at a public school. Two assaults upon Eton, and one each upon Charterhouse and Rugby, were equally dismal defeats. Doubts were cast upon the earnestness of my endeavours, doubts increased when I passed easily first in the Common Entrance Examination for Rugby—and when John, in his turn, became a Scholar of Westminster. I found myself posted accordingly to the Lower Fifth at Rugby—a form for the most part reserved for boys who had won scholarships—and the results were anything but happy. I was not only a disappointment to my form-master, a good-looking but choleric cleric, but also to such members of my house who were also in the Lower Fifth. As veterans of two years' standing or more in the school, what conceivable use could a spectacled little "swot" be, apart from doing their work for them? Alas, I was incapable even of doing my own work creditably. In short, I was just a misfit: futile at games, altogether lacking in personal attractions, not even adequate as an animated "crib." The human boy is very much a realist, and I was not popular at Rugby. Apart from anything else, my name proved a severe cause of offence. Until the outbreak of the First Great War—I went to Rugby in the spring of 1914—it was merely grotesque. After that date it appeared definitely suspicious. That to the average boy Poland was just a part of Russia, and that the Russians were our Allies, had no bearing on the issue. And, as a matter of fact, I should have resented being pilloried as a Russian no less than I resented being termed a German Jew.

I think that my time at Rugby entitles me to say something about the Public School System, because during it the House to which I belonged passed through most of the different possible stages common to the average House during a much longer period. I joined it at a time when it was vastly athletic; almost entirely dominated by those immortalised by Mr. Alec Waugh as "the bloods." That early period was also, frankly, a pretty vicious one. I do not believe, however, that the vice and the athleticism were effect and cause. In my last year the House achieved an even finer athletic record of achievement, and simultaneously an almost offensive puritanism. In the interval I remember a brief spurt of æsthetic ostentation, upheld by a brilliant minority, whom I loathed for refusing to admit me to their number, and among whom Alan Sims, son of the then Keeper of the Royal Academy, was the leading spirit. In spite of my comparative failure in form, with such a flying start I was almost bound to, and in fact, did, achieve the Lower Bench of the Sixth Form at the earliest age possible for a Rugbeian, *i.e.*, sixteen. It was with that achievement that I learned my greatest lesson, and met my deepest humiliations: the mockery of privilege, when character is insufficiently formed to guard it

with power. My very few friends belonged to lower forms. I still remember the horror with which I received the intimation from my housemaster that in the future their company should be barred to me. My new companions of the Sixth were either too old, too athletic, or too personally antipathetic to me to feel inclined to hold out a hand. Isolation of spirit, combined with a certain amount of responsibility for which he knows he is unfit, make hard living for a small boy.

None the less I believe that Rugby did me all the good in the world. It was education achieved in spite of, rather than because of, the System. But it was education all right. One learned to rely on oneself. One learned to enjoy books, because without escape into fiction life would have been sheerly intolerable. One learned the elements of diplomacy. One discovered that one's fellows can some times be discomfited by brains, if not by fists. One learned to keep one's mouth shut—a lesson I regret to say I tend nowadays to forget! One saw proved the truth of Mr. Maugham's admirable statement that "in life it matters less what you do than what you are." The Public Schools are almost always reproached for turning out "a type"—and a type now generally supposed to be outmoded, damned and done for. In fact, the type, for the Empire it does so much to run in its own queer faintly amateurish fashion, is eminently suitable. I entirely agree with the authority who gave it as his opinion that it is quite a good thing to turn a possibly third-rate poet into a good Soudanese Civil Servant. But the Public Schools also turn out a large number of boys who beat the machine at its own game. A less remorseless machine would produce less efficient rebels. Is it too hopelessly far-fetched an idea that had the totalitarian states been possessed of the equivalents of the Public Schools, their oppressed minority parties might have found the leading which would have proved their salvation: leading which might have led to the gallantry of armed resistance, as opposed to the futilities of journalistic polemics and the humiliations of mass flight?

I think that the First German War impinged less upon my generation during term than during the holidays. A certain "second-line" quality in the teaching staff; a great deal of O.T.C. drill—to me infinitely preferable to football; such queer incidentals as the hoarding of one's bread-ration in biscuit-tins, and the substitution of "honey-sugar" for jam; these things remain in my mind. But until 1917, when I began to realise the likelihood of active participation in the business, the War was first a terrific excitement, and then just a background like any other. My parents' anxieties, the wounding of my brother Lewis in one of the subsidiary actions to Loos, the death in action of my cousin Hal in the German counter-attack after Cambrai, the actual experience of an air-raid in the streets of London, tended to fade into unreality behind the palings of the Close and the walls of



one's study, in which one read every page of Gibbon, footnotes and all, in a frenzy of intellectual snobbishness and superiority.

Much credit is due to our Headmaster, until recently Bishop of Liverpool, in preserving the point of view that because it was taken for granted that we were training to be officers, we should train primarily to be men. The idea so glibly stressed by certain writers of the last decade that our generation was knowingly fattened for the slaughter by unimaginative and cynical elders was certainly untrue of Rugby in my day. And the militarist *manqué* found no place among our masters.

Of the latter I remember best "Jackie" Collins, who was never more awake in form than when he appeared three parts asleep. He won my undying affection by evincing an interest, apparently genuine, in my Polish origin, and addressing me invariably as "Ostrolenka." There was "Beaky" Cole, whose enormous nose and steel-rimmed spectacles in no way interfered with his ability to keep discipline and make of The Twenty what was by repute the hardest-worked form in any Public School. There was F. R. Kittermaster, under whom I sat for two years in the Lower Bench, regarding with indulgence the fact that as a History Specialist I could not feel it incumbent upon me to write decent Latin verse or tolerable Latin prose. I still have the lines he sent me on a postcard when at last I gained an Exhibition in history at Oxford:

*Gratulor historico: tam splendida praemia nactus,  
Spernere grammaticae nunc elementa potes!*

On the other side of the account must, I fear, be included a clerical gentleman—fortunately a temporary addition to the staff, who once adjured a semi-hysterical audience in Chapel, "if they really wanted to envisage the Resurrection," to think of the ascent of an Observation Balloon. . . .

I probably owed most to a young master, who, like "Ferrers" in *The Loom of Youth*, was never seen without a pile of books under his arm, and a muffler round his neck. Unfit for war-service, unconventional in appearance and speech, an indifferent disciplinarian, he was an object of some suspicion to the boys, and, I always believed, of some disapproval by his colleagues. I recall a poem written to his address, in parody of one of Sir John Squire's, by Alan Sims:

I heard a voice that cried,  
"Move on there—step aside!"  
And everyone at once  
Like pudding, disappeared.  
And down the rolling road  
Tremendously there strode  
A very fat young man  
In chocolate raiment weird.

And as I gazed thereat,  
And mute and wondering sat,  
I saw without astonishment  
His chin had not been shaved ;  
His tie was loosely tied,  
His collar rolling wide,  
He looked the morning after  
Some incident depraved. . . .

But in spite of his odd clothes, and his faintly Left Wing views, X. could teach—if you would let him. He could and did clothe the dry bones of historical facts and dates with flesh. He related the past to the present. He gave one a glimmering of what is meant by the word "style." He frankly preferred ideas and imagination to accuracy in one's essays. He lent me *Sinister Street*, the Poems of Swinburne, and Rupert Brooke, and Masfield. He gave tea-parties almost after the "Chips" model, at which the guests had to read their own compositions—for the most part queerly stilted, self-conscious and imitative poetry, which it did us no end of good to get out of our systems. He would argue with you about anything for hours on end. He was neither tidy nor competent. But he was enormously human. I believe that after the War he went to the Far East, and got into trouble with the Authorities in China for the expression of Radical views—no doubt termed Revolutionary.

Of my relations with my Headmaster and my Housemaster I find it hard to recall anything worthy of record. Of Dr. David—as he then was—I remember chiefly the admirable brevity of his sermons, an unruffled personal dignity, and in our only two conversations of any intimacy an overwhelming impression of large-mindedness and fairness. With my Housemaster, to be frank, I never got on. Our personalities were fundamentally unsympathetic, and I think we always met each other at our respective worsts. A fine athlete, and a man of great personal charm, he must have found me self-defensive, rather sullen, of no particular credit to the House on the field or as a præpostor, unsociable—generally "difficult." And I fancy that the problem was insufficiently attractive to encourage him towards its solution. That, although fond of strumming on a piano, I could never read music well enough to perform capably as accompanist to the hymn in Hall on Sunday nights, may have proved the final nail in my coffin. But our relations, though bleak, remained generally correct.

That I was from his point of view "difficult" I have no doubt. It is possible that greater allowances might have been made for the difficulties with which I was faced. I was generally unpopular, and almost friendless. I was not bullied in the classic manner of *Tom*

*Brown* : I was neither roasted nor tossed in a blanket. But I have been forced to lace up other people's football boots with icy fingers, and kicked for being slow about it. I have had mustard and water forced down my throat. I have been more or less savagely knocked about. I have had my study quite mercilessly ragged, and my personal possessions—so dear to a rather lonely small boy—smashed or sequestered. At a later stage I have been boycotted—the worst ordeal of all, and the most lasting in its effects. I confess these disagreeable experiences neither with masochistic satisfaction as proving my superiority to the common run of schoolboys, nor with any sense of grievance. I had not the vestige of a sense of humour as it is understood by small boys. I was physically cowardly. I was conceited. I was also too stubborn to conform gladly to the laws of a herd, which intellectually, though for the most part subconsciously, I despised. I suffered accordingly, and on the whole benefited. Whether those at whose hands I suffered and benefited may not have drawn certain false conclusions damaging to themselves, is of course another story.

The public-school-boy's chief danger is precisely the same as that of the young man in a Totalitarian State : the danger of permanently arrested development. There is little to be said against any one of us being at one time in our lives a bit of a bully and a bit of a bore. But it is advisable to take care that bullying and boresomeness are not exalted into what may be miscalled a philosophy. . . .

My principal feelings, as the time approached for me to leave Rugby, were compounded of relief and excitement. A good deal of rubbish, in my opinion, has been written concerning "the lost generation." It has been said that boys who were at school between 1914 and 1918 became attuned to the notion that their fate was to die on the battlefield ; that in consequence they sank into a quasi-Russian fatalism of outlook ; and that when, in fact, the signing of the Armistice saved their lives, they were no longer in any condition to face up to the business of living. But at eighteen I did not reason like that. Nor do I believe that any appreciable number of my generation did so. It was true enough that the "Rupert Brooke" approach to the War had largely died out to be replaced by that of Wilfred Owen. And surely the latter is the greater poet of the two. But we were still young enough to be stirred by the famous "Back to the Wall" order of April ; to feel a certain eagerness to replace brothers and cousins, whose uniformed company on leave had been the most exciting aspects of our holidays. I can find neither explanation of, nor excuse for, the follies of my later years in the fact that the Army, rather than Oxford, was to furnish my next immediate background. So far as I can remember, it was not in the least like a lamb going consciously to the slaughter that I went from Rugby to the Household Brigade Officers' Cadet Battalion at Bushey in the early autumn of 1918.

## CHAPTER III

### " LOTUS-EATING "

WRITING, as I am, during the fifth year of the Second German War, I doubt if I can usefully add to the accumulated literature of experience dealing with the First. I was trained, intensively and in conditions of some discomfort, to be an infantry subaltern. But after reading of, and seeing films of, the training of to-day, I am driven to the humiliating conclusion that by comparison what I suffered at Bushey during the last months of 1918 was a rest-cure. I recall principally watching Gerald du Maurier—also a cadet (my grandmother had given me a letter of introduction to him, but I was too shy to present it to a celebrity and a senior!)—play with local talent in the stage version of *Vice Versa*; the heaven of hot baths when clingingly and consistently companioned by rifle-oil; wandering in miserable solitude through London on Armistice Day in search of some acquaintance with whom to drink to survival and the future; and the hideous dilemma when offered the choice between demobilisation and Oxford, and two years with the Army of Occupation in the Rhineland. A minor history scholarship at Trinity was waiting to be taken up. My parents favoured Oxford. And I had not read *Sinister Street* in vain. But I have often wondered if I chose wisely. I have always regretted that I missed an unrivalled opportunity of learning German. . . .

I cannot pretend that I spent my three years at Oxford either wisely or well. Release from the petty but irksome discomforts of army life, a complete absence of any sense of genuine responsibility, the temptation to lotus-eating inherent in the Oxford or Cambridge environment, combined in the irresistible argument that for a brief space leisure was attainable—and that leisure was meant to be both appreciated and enjoyed. Looking back, I feel little or no regret for having played the drone. Such ambitions as I have were never academic. The lack of a degree has never stood noticeably between me and any job I wanted. On the contrary. During the lean years of the early twenties when harsh economic facts made me only too ready to try my hand at anything, I was to find that the evidence of a university career—vocal inflection, or over-fastidiousness of manner—was infinitely more of a handicap than an advantage. Would I then have done better to have taken a Commercial Correspondence Course, and learned the A B C requirements of the average business man? I do not think so. I think I may claim that I have become by degrees reasonably business-like, almost morbidly punctual, and in general practical in the conduct of my work and my affairs. But I could never, have been happy in an ordinary business office. And, in missing Oxford

I should have missed more than the basic qualifications for a mediocre business career.

If asked just what I did with myself during what were probably the three happiest years of my life to date, I could only reply that I read, that I talked, and that I began to learn how to think, having first appreciated that thought is an indispensable preliminary either to work or pleasure. I learned how to dance. I learned how to carry liquor—which is far more important and less frivolous than it sounds. I realised for the first time—even in that queer period of Cinderella dances and chaperoned teas—that the world is made up of women as well as men, and that my education and experience had up to that point ignored the fact. I wrote the inevitably bad verses and worse novel of adolescence. And I began to take a serious interest in the theatre. . . .

I could not join the O.U.D.S., for the Society had been suspended during the War, and was only revived during my second year, when my interests were fully engaged in other directions. But I formed a small play-reading group—it was called not inappropriately “The Parrots”—and soon found myself involved in the production of amateur theatricals. The play was *The Man Who Stayed at Home*, and the production was designed for the benefit of a military hospital. Less aware then than a little later of my lack of acting ability, I spun a coin with my friend Leslie Harris: the winner to play lead, the loser to produce and undertake the villainous Teutonic spy. I was lucky, and lost. From that moment I realised the frightening fascination of dramatic direction. And the last parental hopes that I might be induced to settle down ultimately to the respectable routine and material rewards of routine in a successful solicitor’s office were destroyed. There were, of course, other factors helping towards that destruction. But they are irrelevant to this account, and may be omitted accordingly.

It was not long before I became involved in a far more ambitious undertaking. Naomi Mitchison was a great friend of my elder brother Lewis. They had acted together during his time at Oxford in 1913. It was rashly assumed that I shared his talent, and I was invited to produce a play of hers called *Barley, Honey and Wine* at the Margaret Morris Theatre in Chelsea. The play had hardly the constituents of popular success, for it dealt with post-classical Greece and her barbarian neighbours; its construction was loose; its length was terrific. But I am glad to have been concerned with a piece whose setting and background were to grow later into that superb novel *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*. And the cast was remarkable, including my brother John, Helen Simpson the novelist, Julian Huxley of Zoological Society and Brains Trust fame, Nigel Playfair’s two sons, Giles and Lyon—who stole the acting honours—and Naomi herself.

I learned quite a good deal from that very amateur production ; the principal lesson being that individuals, however charming and intelligent in themselves, are subject to the queerest transmutations on a stage ; and that not the least of a producer's qualifications for his business is that tact which can only be born of an infinite patience. And this applies as much in dealing with professional actors as with amateurs. . . .

I could write much more of Oxford. But I fear it would be a concession to one of my more abiding weaknesses, a nostalgic sentimentality; and as a chronicle of very small beer, inevitably wearisome to the reader. I doubt if I went down very much more equipped for " the long littleness of life " than I was when I went up. I had made more direct contact with the realities of people and things during six months in the Army than in three years at the university. But it remains an agreeable recollection to have spent a short period of life as an individual genuinely leisured, incredibly care-free : as agreeable as the memory of floating down the Cher late at night towards the moon-washed loveliness of Magdalen Tower, the quiet unbroken save perhaps by very distant singing, or the fizzle of hot tobacco-ash dropping into the river.

The Oxford of those days was, of course, rather abnormal. It was full of returned soldiers, many of whom consorted ill with greenly callow undergraduates. We had not achieved the present-day freedom of " mixed " sherry parties, continual dances, and a generally pervading sense of feminine presence and influence. But even in 1920 the old monastic atmosphere was rapidly fading. The chaperone was still an almost indispensable institution. (I remember well the heroic endurance displayed by my mother in that capacity, when she came up with my party for the Trinity Ball in 1920.) A young man in my college was coldly regarded as much for his ostentation in inviting a minor musical-comedy actress to be his sole partner during Commemoration, as for wearing black *suede* shoes with his evening clothes. But Woman was definitely showing signs of coming into her own, and in the process adding one more to Oxford's list of famous lost causes. . . .

I left Trinity in the summer of 1921 with a heavy heart, and mingled senses of loneliness and apprehension. My last night as an undergraduate had been spent dancing at the Town Hall. No doubt I was weary and jaded. A contemporary photograph reveals a strained expression, and a deplorably crooked white tie. But the wide sweep of the High, as I walked down it under that June dawning, seemed almost intolerably desolate, and very much leading to Nowhere in Particular. I had to face the fact that from that moment I had to earn my own living. I knew that I had no idea how to do it. And I was not liking the prospect at all.

I had not taken my degree. I had both rejected, and been rejected by, the solicitor's office. I was, for the moment, something of a black sheep in the family fold. And I had, with considerable unwisdom, taken upon myself certain responsibilities, under the influence of motives more creditable to my heart than to my head. It will be remembered that the early twenties were lean years for those in search of employment. Thousands of better men than I—men with the best of claims to the gratitude of their country—were looking vainly for jobs. My chances seemed thin. The outlook could reasonably be described as grim.

Rather oddly I made at that time no attempt upon the stage. My brother John was laying the foundations of his career during this time, at the Old Vic, the R.A.D.A., and the Regent, and there was probably something of envy in my failure even to try to follow at his heels. I did my best to combine free-lance writing with some form of commercial activity, in the desperate hope that success in the former field would arrive swiftly to rescue me from the latter. That hope was neither justified nor fulfilled. I was indeed only rescued from the toils of a business career by my demonstrable incapacity. And, like a good many other young men, I was to find that a certain facility with a pen does not imply that one can make a living with it. My experiences as a commercial traveller—I was "in" typewriters and subsequently books—were for the most part humiliating, and proportionately valuable. They would however, make dull reading and, while I do not regret them, I should get no pleasure from remembrance of them in any detail. . . .

By comparison, an interlude on the staff of a newly-established comic paper was comforting, and even amusing. I got the job by sheer undiluted "influence." My sister-in-law had made friends with Lord Riddell in Paris during the Peace Conference, and wrote him a letter on my behalf. I was bidden accordingly to an interview in the offices of the *News of the World*. Never before had I seen a Press Baron in the flesh, and I confess I was considerably disappointed. The office was small, and seemed both shabby and grubby. His lordship, sitting on a chair with its back between his knees, drank a cup of tea without offering me one, and finally removed a bowler hat from the back of his head while he telephoned to George Newnes, Ltd. "I've a young man here I want you to use," he said crisply. "Four pounds ten a week. I'll send him along right away."

I departed for Southampton Street in a state of some excitement. Newnes meant for me the *Strand Magazine*, and *John o' London's Weekly*. I could hardly aspire to the *Strand*. But *John o' London* seemed to me to be just the cup of tea which I had not received from Lord Riddell. I thought of reviewing, of literary articles and biographies, and the very pavements glittered. Mr.

Reeves Shaw, however, to whose lot it fell, no doubt irritatingly enough, to dust off a chair for Lord Riddell's insignificant *protégé*, had other and less attractive ideas. A new tuppenny weekly was about to make its bow. And I became one of the two first sub-editors of *The Humorist*. I was grateful enough for the job. I would have been grateful for any job other than that of walking streets, carrying heavy weights, and trying to overcome an ingrained scepticism about the value of anything which I wanted to sell to people who didn't want to buy. But I have to admit that *The Humorist* failed to satisfy what I can only call my ambitions. The cutting of humorous "pars" and jokes from American papers, and the translation of the same into basic-magazine English, soon palled. I continued to look longingly towards those frosted-glass doors on which were painted *The Strand*, and *John o' London's Weekly*. I remembered some of the fiction I had read. I recalled Arnold Bennett's articles. I came to the conclusion that I must establish my personality with Mr. Reeves Shaw; that he would swiftly be convinced as a result that my talents were wasted on *The Humorist*. I set my teeth and went to work. I asked him to read my short stories. I plagued him in his office with memoranda full of suggestions covering a field far outside the range of the sub-editor of a comic paper. When they drew no reply—I imagine they were swiftly consigned to the waste-paper-basket—I forced myself upon him in person. Reeves Shaw was personally genial, invariably kind. He was inclined to boom, and I think he must sometimes have wished that Lord Riddell might have landed him with a more familiar type of animal. But even his amiability had its limits. After about six months he sent for me one day after luncheon, and addressed me more or less as follows: "Young man, I am personally well-disposed towards you. I find you nice-mannered, reasonably hard-working, and generally presentable. But this is an old-fashioned firm, which has done, and is doing, very nicely thank you. You do not seem happy with things as they are. No doubt it is because of your youth and enthusiasm. But you have too many ideas for improvement. You are clearly too good for us. I must wish you, regretfully but firmly, good afternoon."

And so I took my departure from Southampton Street, not without a final backward glance at those frosted glass doors inscribed with the titles of *The Strand Magazine* and *John o' London's Weekly*. My belief in Mr. Arnold Bennett as a guide to a Young Man's Career had suffered a severe and indeed irreparable shock. Not that I cherished any feeling of grievance against Mr. Reeves Shaw. I must have irritated him almost beyond bearing. Also he had the last word. We met again some years later, when I had joined the British Broadcasting Corporation. I was lunching in a restaurant, and Reeves Shaw passed my table. He stopped, stared slightly—I had



recently grown a beard—smiled recognition, and observed, “You see, Gielgud, I was quite right. You *were* too good for us.” I feel that the remark is a tribute both to his memory, and his manners.

After which I had to seek fresh fields in which to earn my living. I was for a time a private tutor, and for a slightly longer time a Member of Parliament’s private secretary. I enjoyed both jobs, largely because of the immense kindness and consideration shown to me by my employers, and the interest of meeting types of people, and living in an environment, hitherto strange to me. Meanwhile I continued stubbornly and unsuccessfully to write. Two unpublished novels, a play in verse, and many short stories belong to this period. The novels could not have been very much worse. They were largely autobiographical, and written without a grain of humour. But I was fortunate in that one of them came somehow to be read in typescript by Mr. Michael Sadleir. He raised my hopes to heaven by asking me to lunch—and a very good lunch too—at the Café Royal, and dashed them down by his kind but firm rejection of the book. But he also gave me a piece of advice, which I have never forgotten, though how excellent it was I did not at the time appreciate.

“It seems to me,” he said, “that you are making a natural but bad mistake. You are writing novels about a life you know and don’t like. The art of fiction is the art of telling a story. It might be called the art of telling agreeable lies. Why not try writing about a life you don’t know, but which you think you would like?”

It was as a direct result of this conversation that I abandoned literary realism, and tried my hand at romantic sensationalism; that I abandoned the *coulisses* of Bloomsbury and South Kensington, for the marches of Ruritania and Middle Eastern Europe, as the backgrounds for my novels. The resulting books may not have been much better—but they were more readable; they were—if not best-sellers—at least published; and they were far more fun to write. . . .

The play in verse—it dealt very rashly with the Orestes story—can most happily be left in the limbo where it is buried. Some of the short stories, however, did appear occasionally in print. And there are certain aspects of the short-story commercial market which puzzle me now as much as they puzzled me twenty years ago.

I am referring to the large class of popular magazine, the reading of which used before the Second German War to provide the principal occupation of people travelling by rail. The cover and lay-out of one was hardly distinguishable from another. The same young man with a clean-cut if moronic face embraced an equally moronic hair-dresser’s dummy of a young woman against a background of sky eternally and improbably blue. In the stories themselves—they were not made easier to read by the odd tradition of interleaving advertisements—fiction was far far stranger than truth. Virtue invariably triumphed.

The engagement ring always implied connubial bliss. Crime never paid. All physical facts beyond kissing level were ignored. Husbands and wives quarrelled without any basis of reality, and were reconciled altogether without conviction. Murder was neither squalid nor brutal. Life was all black and white, or gold and blue. Light and shade, half-measures, the infinite gradations between good and evil motives, all those things which make life so complex and so fascinating, were thrust aside. Not only was one magazine hardly to be distinguished from another of the type, but each number of the same magazine pursued an apparently unshakeable policy of trying to be as like as possible to every other number. Both in serials and short stories a comparatively limited number of authors, favoured by what may surely be called without offence "a common touch," played infinite variations upon the same threadbare and conventional themes.

I wondered why. I still wonder why. During the past few years I have come to be acquainted personally with several editors of such magazines. They are often ladies: ladies of elegance, amiability, and charm, who show every sign of having taken more than one leaf out of their own Fashion Supplements. Their masculine colleagues are always emphatic about their practical abilities, their professional capacity. I question neither. But these magazines are supposed for the most part to cater for women. They are edited by women, largely written by women, for women. I have always understood, and I have certainly come to believe, that women are realists—far greater realists than men. Do they wish to conceal the fact? Is their daily life so real and earnest, that their reading must be set in line with the cream-cake, and the Palm Court orchestra? Or is it just within the bounds of possibility that the editors may be wrong?

Whenever I have, with the greatest possible delicacy, hinted at this alarming possibility, I have always been defeated by the final and unanswerable appeal to the Mammon of the balance-sheet. The magazine in its past, present, and apparently unalterable future form, pays good dividends. Were its stories to embark on the rough seas of the original, the good, even—God help us! the beautiful, the dividends might fall. In short, why not let well alone?

On the other hand it is just conceivable—I believe it likely—that dividends might increase; that editors and writers might be improved by having to deal in literature instead of a dreary type of grocery; that truth and vitality never yet harmed any product, however much it may have to be designed for general consumption. I hope to show in later chapters that my experience with the B.B.C. gives some evidence that public taste may well be considerably in advance of the standards accepted for it by professional purveyors of entertainment. The makers of films, the managers of theatres, have too often fallen into the same trap. They play safe so consistently and for so long,

that vitality and interest and fresh blood all disappear as parts of the essential make-up of their activities. Then they blame the public for the avidity with which it welcomes some new thing. Having debauched the virgin, they then read her a lecture on the value of sentimental fidelity. However, in most fields a new world redresses the balance of the old, and compels unwilling imitation. And the exigencies of war and paper restriction, have helped to break down the barriers of old-time conventional length and make-up. My old and unattainable love, *The Strand*, is now lilliputian in size. *Picture Post* has shown what can be done after a diligent study of life. The admirable and ubiquitous "Penguins" have infiltrated formidably into the defences in depth of the railway-station bookstalls. And I learn, on reasonably good authority, that even the longest-established periodicals produced by the great firms publishing weeklies and magazines, are in some peril of overhaul, revision, even of metamorphosis. I only wish this could have happened twenty years ago. I had not even the consolation prize of being one of those who profited by the glittering and gilt-edged enterprise of Mr. Gilbert Frankau when he undertook to edit *Britannia*. I believe that ill-fated periodical stands yet without a rival in having paid so much, to so many, for so very very little. . . .

For the digression I apologise. It is inadequate, either as explanation or excuse, for my failure to make a living on the sunnier side of Fleet Street. Sir Frank Meyer, having been ordered to Madeira for his health, needed my secretarial services no longer, and I found myself as usual in depressingly low water. It happened about this time, that the Oxford Repertory Company under J. B. Fagan was playing a season in London, and had just transferred its production of *The Cherry Orchard* from the Lyric, Hammersmith, to the Royalty Theatre. My brother John—now reasonably established as a promising young actor—was the "Trophimov." I went to the play, partly, of course, to see and criticise his performance (it was quite admirable), partly because for reasons both personal and æsthetic I have always been fascinated by Russian literature. I thought that I knew a little about Tchegov, and I was not particularly convinced by the Fagan production. It seemed to me far too dimly conceived in terms of a perpetual twilight more than Celtic; too unaware of that farcical and childish angle which give the plays of Tchegov their essential humanity. It is an angle, incidentally, almost always ignored by the author's intellectual devotees, who cannot and will not see the cherry orchard for the gloom, the long beards, the all-pervading Slav melancholy.

I was in John's dressing-room after the performance, and Mr. Fagan came in. It appeared that he had been deprived unexpectedly of the services of his assistant-stage-manager. Half jokingly I suggested that I should like the job. Mr. Fagan looked at me with a twinkling

eye. It may have been that I did not look altogether unlike "the shabby student," with my glasses, and over-intense expression, though off-stage I resemble John hardly at all.

"You would have to understudy 'Trophimov,'" he said. "Could you do it?"

I thought it most unlikely, but I said I could try.

The result was that ten minutes later I found myself reading the part of "Trophimov" on the stage of the Royalty to an invisible Mr. Fagan somewhere in the dust-sheeted auditorium. James Whale gave me cues from the wings with an air and accent of faint disapproval. I dislike auditions now. I disliked that audition then. The echoing gloom and dustiness of the empty theatre filled me with more than Russian depression. For once I genuinely hated the sound of my own voice. I knew that I was trying to imitate John's reading of the part; and felt instinctively that it was a stupid thing to do. I anticipated the depths of humiliating failure. In short, I took the whole thing a great deal more seriously than did either Mr. Fagan, or even James Whale. I must have done—for I got the job, and so became a professional actor.

I had little opportunity to display my talents during the rest of the short run of *The Cherry Orchard*: I played "The Tramp"—he has, I believe, four lines—and I danced with great energy in the party scene as one of the crowd. Meanwhile, like all understudies, I hoped that John's health might not be so persistently good. My hope, very properly, was disappointed. And then an entirely new chapter was opened. Mr. Fagan invited me to go with the company when it returned to the Playhouse at Oxford. And, while I was to continue stage-managing, it was hinted that I might play one or two parts not altogether without importance. I accepted with much enthusiasm—and with even more apprehension.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERLUDE—AN INNOCENT ABROAD—I. POLAND, 1920

I SHALL be neither surprised nor aggrieved if the reader skips this chapter. It is sufficiently self-contained to be skipped without loss. It is probably far too personal to be particularly interesting. Yet I cannot help feeling that it has its place in the scheme of this book. It consists simply of extracts from my diary of 1920, transcribed exactly as written, describing a brief visit to Poland during July and August of that year.

It was my first trip to a foreign country, and proportionately exciting to an undergraduate in his second year. At the end of the First German War my brother Lewis had gone from the Army to a new international body called the League of Red Cross Societies. During 1918 he had been attached to General Haller, commanding the Polish forces in France, as a *liaison* officer. As a result of this, and possibly of the family connection with Poland, he was sent by the Red Cross to Warsaw. And he suggested that I might spend a part of the Long Vacation more interestingly and profitably in his company than with the more conventional reading-party.

There were considerable complications in the way. Poland was still officially "a belligerent area." The Bolshevik-Polish War was in full blast. The casual traveller or sightseer was liable to be considered more trouble than he was worth in the chaotic conditions prevailing all over Eastern Europe during that immediately post-war period. But at length—after visits to more Government offices than I had believed existed, the necessary permits and *visas* were achieved. I was to go to Danzig by sea, through the Kiel Canal and the Baltic. Lewis would meet me there. And on July 6th, an appalling day of continuous drizzle, I left Fenchurch Street station and boarded a thousand-ton cargo steamer, the *Saint Croix*, which was bound ultimately for Riga. From which point the diary can be left to speak for itself. But I must repeat that the entries are now twenty-six years old and that the naive and jejune comments upon people, places and things must be regarded with the charity due to the young and the impressionable. . . .

*July 6th.*—I find myself sharing my cabin with an agreeable American, with the inevitable strong puffy face and equally inevitable glasses, a considerable traveller with a vigorous sensual streak, which crops out continually in his conversation. Also with a fat Lettish commercial traveller, who is not physically attractive! In general, the travellers are a mixed lot—the majority being hairy aliens being repatriated to the Baltic States from Canada. They jabber unintelligibly, and eat exclusively with a knife and their fingers. Most of the crew are Scandinavians. If to-night's dinner is anything to go on the food is good. Wrote up my diary in pencil on the deck, the rain having stopped at last, and got into talk with a couple of Poles—one from the Legation in London; the other—recently with our troops in Archangel—a slight sallow little student on vacation from London University. It was strangely beautiful when the lights shone out over the dockyard and the water, with the chimneys and huge cranes looming through the dusk against the darkening sky. . . .

*July 8th.*—Land is again in sight to starboard; a lighthouse on what I imagine to be one of the Frisian Islands. Sky again grey, and weather inclined to rainy. We reached Brunsbüttel and entered the

Kiel Canal just after eleven in the morning. There were two children on the quay, staring at us while we waited to land mail and have our papers examined. The younger rather attractive, squirrel-like; the elder with a typically Boche crop. Both looked horribly starved, thin, sallow, with legs and arms like match-sticks, and swollen tummies. So one had little appetite for lunch. There was a four-funnelled cruiser, very rusty and dirty, with coal stacked promiscuously about her deck. Also three submarines, cleaner and looking sufficiently seaworthy, but with very draggled naval ensigns. Further along a second cruiser, an old type with all its armament removed, in tow to a couple of tugs. So much for the mighty fall of the High Seas Fleet. There were also four rusted quick-firing guns emplaced at the entrance to the Canal. But the principal impression was one of Desolation: flat plain on both sides, fields sodden and deserted, looking too green, and the houses with hideous yellow blinds looking too red, as though out of a toy-box. The only people I saw in miles was an old man in tattered field-grey carrying a rake, and a couple of soldiers. The great bridges look to be wonderful feats of engineering, and at the same time astonishingly unstable!

During the day made the acquaintance of a fat and vast-moustached gentleman with a fatter wife, who had been in Riga during its siege and capture by the Germans, and again in Bermond's siege, escaping to England before the Bolshevik occupation. They were going back to the house they had lived in for thirty-five years! . . . Reached the far end of the Canal about midnight: a blaze of lights like Piccadilly Circus. A Boche policeman greeted us with transpontine scowls, and fingered a wicked-looking dagger in his belt as though he lusted for our blood. No doubt he did. The wind was rising. In the cabin the Lett insisted on giving me practical advice concerning whoring, which he recommended on sternly medical grounds. He spoke of his amorous adventures in London at great length—and I abandoned the cabin when he reached the stage of virtuous indignation at having had to pay more than ten shillings for any girl! I suppose I am thin-skinned, but my imagination began to work overtime, and I just felt awfully sick!

*July 10th.*—Awoke at five in the morning to bright sunshine, and, Lettish atmosphere having by no means grown upon me, went on deck to read and smoke and watch the incredible gilding of the sand of the Pomeranian coast. About ten we ran into the mouth of the Vistula and Danzig harbour. Soon sighted Lewis and Mimi (*his French wife*) in a car by the quay. But there were long and tiresome delays before one could get ashore—especially as I was celebrating my return to my native land by some amateur smuggling: a thousand cigarettes for Lewis wrapped in a travelling-rug. Got

them safely through by the simple expedient of taking out and sitting on the rug while the Customs went through my Gladstone bag. Rest of the party: Albert Boyden, of the American Red Cross; Rafalski, a Pole, ugly but rather charming; and the chauffeur, popularly called Sam, who had driven for an American Staff in France. Lunched in Danzig, looking both essentially German and essentially prosperous, and thence by car—and I thought perilously fast—to Tczew. The country attractive, like the better part of Berkshire on a bigger scale. No hedges, which of course gave an impression of space, size and air. Stiflingly hot. And I had of course always thought of Poland as being sub-arctic! The road seemed covered with poultry and children through the villages, who scared me to death by running *at* the wheels of the car. To pass the frontier picket and the Polish frontier proper gave me a queer and absurd twitch of the heart. I can have no right to feel like an exile coming home—but there it was! To Starogradu for dinner: the place full of troops—the 65th Infantry Regiment—all walking about with huge swords or naked bayonets in their belts. I was almost too tired to eat. But I drank some good *cognac*, and rather raw German white wine diluted with soda. Scribbled rather desperately in my diary, and to bed.

*July 11th.*—Woken fairly early, still pretty tired. Before leaving we saw more Polish troops marching through the town: rather a shabby lot in mixed uniforms of blue and grey, but sturdy and keeping a good step. The cost of the night's lodging, dinner and breakfast, for the six of us came to exactly 4200 Polish marks: eighteen shillings at the present rate of exchange! I begin to get used to being whirled across Pomerania and Posnania by Sam, packed like a sardine between Lewis and Boyden—Mimi in front, one finger permanently on the horn-button! As we left Bornice we passed a procession of Polish girls, some of them by no means bad-looking, in a sort of semi-uniform with a band and banners. All the towns full of soldiers. To Torun by evening. We seemed to go faster than ever all day, but the only casualties were one hen, and a puncture just as we got into Torun. The old German forts by the road seemed small and pretty innocuous. A good if curious meal at the hotel of steaming black crayfish and boiled eggs, both of which had to be eaten with the fingers!

*July 12th.*—Again a grilling day, with a burning blue sky and not a sign of a cloud. We all woke late, so that we breakfasted in a great hurry, and dashed off for Posnan at a great pace, killing a couple of chickens and getting three more punctures *en route*. Posnan is big and hideous after the German fashion. To-night we read a rather disquieting *communiqué* from the front, and Haller's particularly *chic* appeal for volunteers.

*July 13th.*—Boyden continues, in true American fashion, to urge us to early rising on the plea that we must "make time!" But I fancy he is worried about the developments of the war situation, and is anxious to be back in Warsaw. We made the 350 odd kilometres to Warsaw by half past four in the afternoon. It was exciting to leave Posnania and get into the Old Kingdom of Poland with no relics of Boche cultivation, and all the signs of the 1915 fighting: shell-holes in the roads; the church at Lowicz smashed to ruins; house-walls pitted with bullet-holes. Beside the road the poplars had been stripped and battered, and there were shallow scraped trenches among the growing crops of rye and potatoes. The country much the same as to the west except that it is flatter. The towns much smaller, dirtier, and less picturesque; very noticeably full of Jews in greasy black gaberdines. One begins to understand how hard it is for people in England, who only see the washed and civilised variety, to believe in the genuine anti-Jewish feeling in Poland—or indeed the flaming patriotism which has already given Haller 300,000 volunteers, and 56 million marks! The last fifty kilometres into Warsaw were sheer agony to the flesh owing to the battering to pieces of the road by German transport in the war. . . .

Dined admirably at the Astoria. During the meal a squadron of cavalry passed down the street headed by trumpeters in old-fashioned full uniforms, and an amaranth-and-silver banner. We went home in a thunderstorm, with most brilliant sheet-lightning.

*July 14th.*— . . . Endeavoured to find my way on foot to the Hotel Bruhlovski, where Lewis has his office. But after tackling in vain two Americans, a French officer, and the local Y.M.C.A., I solved the problem by taking a droshky: a dilapidated affair drawn by a living skeleton of a horse. . . . An excellent dinner at the Astoria, during which I watched with dumb admiration a scion of the noble house of Poniatowski—very beautiful in a tight-fitting *bleu-horizon* uniform—putting down no fewer than thirteen glasses of vodka before and during the meal. The vodka is just placed *en carafe* on the table, and has been known to be mistaken for water by the unwary. I was told of a lady—wife of some vaguely diplomatic person—who not long since filled up a glass of claret with vodka, with amusing if deplorable results! Again a very hot day. The Warsaw streets are a veritable patchwork quilt of uniforms: lots of French in pale blue; a few Italians in their big and graceful green-grey cloaks, the ubiquitous dark blue of the British Navy; American Army, Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross. Even a solitary Japanese, with a permanent smile that seemed put on like a mask. Poniatowski spoke with admiration of Carton de Wiart, who appears to have taken over the defence of Lwow, besieged at the time by the



Ukrainians, as a sort of personal war. He seems to be generally a popular hero among the Poles. . . .

*July 15th.*—Joined to-day at luncheon by a Polish lancer lieutenant due to go off to the front this evening : nice-looking, seemingly not very bright, and an old Etonian. Also by an English Captain X., who speaks no Polish. But as he could get no job in England came out and secured a commission in a Polish lancer regiment. He sat over a particularly good mushroom omelette, learning words of command out of a drill-book by heart ! Incessant collecting for Haller's volunteer army going on, and apparently going well, which is to the good. For the military situation seems to be deteriorating every day, to judge from the big map in Lewis' office. After dinner we strolled down towards the Vistula, and drank iced black coffee in an open-air café place by one of the great bridges. Unfortunately the lighting is no longer what it was. Music has been banned in public places, and there has even been a rumour of a ban on alcohol !

*July 16th.*—All day it has been desperately hot and stuffy and trying, with such conditions hardly improved by a strike of droshkys ! Wilno has been lost. But Dubno has been recaptured, and there is general talk to-day of a probable armistice. I should judge the Poles would accept, things being as they are. But will a triumphant Soviet ? The position is unquestionably exceedingly grave. Count O. dined with us at the Astoria in the evening : very nice, and singularly ugly after the type of the ex-Crown Prince Wilhelm. Before the war he was one of the men who was worth anything you like to name, with huge estates in Russia. Now his mother and brother are both in the hands of the Bolsheviks, the latter being forced to work on the railway. His salary—60,000 roubles a month !—gives one some notion of the present value of money in Red Russia. Walked back to Piekna, and a lot of cavalry clattered past on the way. . . .

*July 17th.*—Taken this afternoon to pay various calls. First on a Russian lady who spent two months defending her estate against the Reds, and handling a machine gun herself, before escaping finally through the Pinsk marshes ; a delightful individual, and good-looking into the bargain in a queer way. Thence to the old Princess Radziwill, who looked just like the creation of a Victorian novelist, very dried-up and savage, and consciously the aristocrat. She had all the family-trees of Poland by heart, plus all the inevitable foliage of scandal. Finally to the wife of the Italian military *attaché*, a graceful pretty woman, who talked admirable English, and whom I found quite delightful. No real news all day, but continual armistice rumours. Saw Y. at dinner, who said cheerfully, " When they get to Grodno or Brest, I pack and go. None of the hero-business for

me ! ” I am far from feeling heroic, but I don’t want to go at all—in spite of a bed that is too short and too hard. . . .

*July 18th.*—It is hard if not almost impossible to concentrate on the niceties of Roman Law, with conditions as they are. This morning it became quite impossible owing to the noise made by a Polish airplane manœuvring over the city all morning. Rather a poor lunch at the Polonia. After to some distant relatives of ours: an old lady with two daughters. One, a flapper, gave me up as hopeless owing to the inadequacy of my French—and I don’t blame her ! The other girl spoke English and could not have been more charming to me. She had been in Petrograd during the Revolution and the Bolshevik *coup d’état*, and expressed great scorn for the cowardice and incompetence of the Russian aristocracy and officers. She goes to the front herself next week as a nurse, and wants to come up to Oxford in October ! It seems far away in another world, but I could genuinely say that I hoped to see her there. Zamoyski brought late news after dinner that the Reds have refused the armistice. After which ? Z. had come to get Red Cross help to evacuate his mother, who is somewhere out in the Grodno region. O. leaves for the front on Tuesday.

*July 19th.*—Provisionally this evening the storm broke at last. Apparently it is true that the Bolsheviks have refused the armistice. I suppose this may imply open war with Britain and France, in which case I may yet have to spend a couple of years in the army. The city is full of excitement—a sort of tense keyed-up waiting for the unknown, which can be *felt*. . . . Things look black, and I fancy Lewis means me to take Mimi out of the country inside a week so as to be ready to stay to the last moment himself. My own feelings are oddly compounded of thrill and apprehension ! I shall really hate it if I have to go. . . .

*July 20th.*—Lewis has been officially recalled to Geneva, with a view to being sent later to Prague. So it is provisionally fixed that we go on Friday night by Danzig, Berlin and Cologne. On hearing which I felt a spasm of self-loathing at the idea of leaving Warsaw to its agony. There is no better news to-day, and it seems to me that there is a distinct panic atmosphere in the streets. My luggage incidentally is still somewhere between Tczew and Warsaw ! What will now become of it, God knows. . . .

*July 22nd.*—To-night a most interesting dinner. B. there, very military in his monocle and talking quite execrable French—and Boris Savinkov, who is reputed to be in Warsaw on behalf of the White General Wrangel. Savinkov very Tartar in type—he is in fact a Little Russian from the south—and made me think rather of a banker than of a notorious terrorist. Then you look at his eyes, which are narrow, and tawny like a tiger’s, and you are convinced

that he would make a bad enemy. He has a quiet cool voice and a quick decisive manner. Entirely charming. Of course, he was hugely interesting on Russia, and the general prospects of Bolshevism. He says that the old imperial officers serving in the Red Army are pro-German monarchists, doomed to disappointment and probably to death when they march into Berlin—if they ever get there. They are all listed by the Bolsheviks for that end. He claimed among other things to know the president-designate of the Paris Soviet! Which seems to be marching rather fast. He also made one realise the curious fact that you can have a revolution in a great city without most people realising that anything out of the ordinary is going on! In Petrograd the trams continued to run, and Chaliapin to sing at the Opera, during the rising. And the final Bolshevik *coup* was settled in their favour by a single naval brigade from the Baltic Fleet. . . .

*July 23rd.*— . . It looks now as if I shall have to go to Paris alone on Monday, Lewis and Mimi following with William Boyden on Wednesday. I was told that the Reds captured Grodno in this way: some Cossacks, raiding communications, picked up a stragling Polish sergeant, killed him, and flayed the body. They then galloped into Grodno, with the remains impaled on a lance. The main Polish force in retreat, coming across this spectacle as they came into the town, panicked and bolted. One can't help distrusting all such atrocity yarns. But this account was hideously detailed and circumstantial.

*July 24th.*—To the Europaïski to dine with General Haller. His chief of staff, Colonel Malinovski, and his A.D.C., a smart young lieutenant of Posnanian lancers, there also. No question but here is a real personality, with force written all over him, and coming out in every sentence. I should judge rather more personality than brains, but there is plenty of intelligence there. He spoke highly of the Red cavalry, but said of the rest of the Bolshevik Army that to-day's armistice is as likely as not to disband it, as it is just harvest-time in Russia, and the peasants will want to go home. In his view they had reached the culmination of their present offensive effort. Who is right, he or Savinkov? There was a great drive for deserters by police patrols in the streets to-day, who stopped everyone of military age, and demanded papers. The few men they gathered in were a poor-looking lot, looking scared, desperate, or merely sullen. But in general the troops march through on their way to the front singing, and apparently in excellent heart. Under a splendid moon the big Russian Cathedral looked rather wonderful in the greenish light, its domes looming against the stars . . . .

*July 25th.*—Woke rather late, but as soon as I was dressed walked hurriedly down to the Saxon Square to see Haller's first three

battalions of volunteers parade, before leaving for the front. I only got there in time to see them march off, but they looked very well, in spite of wearing the most astonishing mixed uniforms: horizon-blue, khaki, and field-grey all together! People did not cheer at all as they passed. They were quite silent, and a good many were crying quietly. It was most impressive, and one felt horribly like a deserter. Out in the afternoon to see the Sobieski palace at Wilanow, with its French gardens, and the solid marble oratory used by his French queen. Standing inside it one felt as if inside a refrigerator! It chilled through to the marrow. Many lovely things in it, including the cabinet given to Sobieski by the Emperor after the Relief of Vienna and some wonderful painted ceilings. The Boches had packed up not a few of the best things, but failed to get away with their loot beyond Warsaw. The gardens were lovely: tall old trees arching over avenues with views beyond of an arm of the Vistula, and overhead a glowing light-blue sky . . .

*July 26th.*—The last news—received while we were actually in the train—was that the Reds are into Bialystok, and the armistice is a *fait accompli*. Another hideous atrocity story, this time from Minsk, where the Reds captured a Red Cross Unit, stripped the nurses, and flung them alive into a well. We left just before midday, and in spite of the many pleasant people at the station, I felt sore and sorry at going. We got to the Czech frontier about nine in the evening, and there was a hellish fuss over customs examination. One was searched to the skin, and they took away Lewis' studs and links, on the grounds that to take valuables out of the country was forbidden. Mimi got very cross. Lewis preserved a calm, which I much admired . . .

*July 28th.*—Arrived in Paris, after a very tolerable journey. And so ends a fascinating experience. I am left with the firm determination to go back to Poland as soon as any sort of opportunity offers—if indeed there is any Poland to go back to! . . .

It was more than ten years before that opportunity offered. But the Battle of the Vistula, in which Haller's troops played a part by no means inconsiderable, had ensured that there should be for a time at least a free and independent Poland to which a traveller, no longer quite so innocent—alas!—could return.

## CHAPTER V

### "A POOR PLAYER . . ."

THE OXFORD REPERTORY, as I knew it, owed everything to the talent, enthusiasm, and taste of J. B. Fagan. He had his weaknesses, and

his failures. He was not punctual. He was not, in the strictest sense of the word, practical. He was liable to swing with disconcerting suddenness from one enthusiasm to another, with regard both to plays and personalities. But he was utterly and superbly undaunted by difficulties. And he was deliciously good-humoured. He not only displayed boundless vitality. He generated it in others. He may have been inclined to pick people of quaintly freakish disposition and qualities for his company. I doubt if all of them recognised their good fortune in having been chosen. For "J. B." had a talent for getting the best out of his raw material, where the ordinary manager-producer would not have bothered after a first failure. There was a moment when he almost succeeded in persuading me that I could, after all, act . . .

My two seasons at the Oxford Playhouse were hideously hard-working, and extremely happy. The happiness could not be attributed to anything about the building itself. Originally I believe a Victorian Zoological Museum, it stood at the parting of the ways northward out of Oxford—the Woodstock and Banbury Roads. It almost faced Somerville College in a somewhat shame-faced way. Its dressing-rooms were altogether without amenities. Its seating was the hardest in any hemisphere. Its lighting switchboard, picturesquely giving forth green flames, was by no means to be handled without rubber gloves. Its stage, with its elaborate false proscenium which made prompting a nightmare, was most ill-adapted for its purposes. Its stage staff was practically non-existent. The way of the enthusiast for drama in Great Britain is proverbially hard. But no building could have been designed so successfully to keep the average comfort-loving undergraduate away as the old Oxford Playhouse. That J. B. could keep his flag flying over it for so long was a miracle in itself. That he should have done so without lowering his standard of aesthetics, and while continually raising the prestige of his company, was a marvel.

I hope that my former companions of those strenuous days will not take it amiss if I repeat the epithet "freakish" as applying to the company. For we were, I fancy, an odd lot. Two of the most promising of J. B.'s players had just left him—my brother and Miss Elissa Landi. I hold several grudges against Hollywood, as will appear. High on the list is Hollywood's failure to make use of Miss Landi's astonishing beauty and talent. I shall never forget the first time I saw her. She came into a ballroom crowded with the hideous short-skirted evening frocks of the early twenties, wearing a rose-red crinoline. And she waltzed like an angel, or a Viennese. It was impossible to look at anyone else in the room. Of our conversation I only remember that she talked intelligently, if rather affectedly, about Chopin. I never met her again. But I saw her act several times,

and I will never believe that she was born for supporting characters in films, and the writing of rather conventional novels.

There remained, however, Alan Napier, and Richard Goolden to give the company respectively height and whimsicality; Reginald Smith to provide breadth and weight; Glen Byam Shaw, Virginia Isham, and Gwendolen Evans. Reginald Smith was in due course to follow me to Broadcasting House, Richard Goolden, of course, to establish himself as the most typical of all "little men," and almost permanent denizen of "The Old Town Hall," thereby depriving the theatre of the only first-rate character actor I have known who never quite abandoned some of the more endearing traits of the amateur. To see him play Lob in "Dear Brutus" you would have believed that he had never done anything but act since he left his cradle. To see him trying to make up his mind at an early rehearsal which hand to use to open a door would compel some scepticism as to whether he had ever acted before in his life!

Hollywood, alas, has swallowed Alan Napier also. I miss him, not only as a friend, but because with his departure overseas ended a clash of view concerning acting that had been a stimulant to me for years. An actor to the tips of his long fingers, he was appalled by my apparent levity, and in particular by my dislike of make-up. I hated putting grease on my face and I hated the feel of grease on my skin. I would make do with a hasty application of brown powder dusted over the slightest possible foundation. It was one of the company's many standing jokes that Alan Napier in any part whatsoever, made up as far down as his navel. It was certainly true—I know, because for long I shared a dressing-room with him—that he never allowed himself less than an hour for the enthralling preliminaries to his evening's work. He was convinced that this aversion from make-up proved both that I did not take acting seriously, and that acting could not really be my *métier*. At Oxford I denied both impeachments hotly. Now I am pretty sure he was right. The born actor is a single-minded enthusiast, and the successful actor needs to be. I could never be quite single-minded about the theatre. I have never been able entirely to forget that all acting is based on the delightful, but childish, hypothesis of "Let's pretend." There have even been moments—as a rule in the course of some especially hard-fought and exhausting rehearsal—when I have come to the conclusion that quite a number of actors suffer from development arrested permanently at a remarkably early age. What a number of actors must think of all producers is of course another story . . .

In spite, however, of Alan Napier's enthusiasm, and his devastating inroads upon his make-up box, the best professional among us was, I am sure, Gwendolen Evans. She was to die, tragically young, soon after she had begun to achieve recognition in London. And I have

met no one in my life whom I conceive to have been more hardly treated by fate. It was not that she was exceptionally good-looking or outstandingly intelligent. But her approach to all her work was distinguished by complete integrity, commonsense, and hard work. In the best sense of the word—not the sentimental one—she was a “trouper.” To play with her was a joy. In a company struggling against the odds implied by the simultaneous learning of one part, rehearsing a second, and playing a third week after week, Gwendolen Evans stood firm and strong like Gibraltar. Almost alone among us she not only knew her own words, she knew ours as well. I was lucky enough to “play opposite” to her in *Misalliance*, in *Arms and the Man*, in *The Circle*, and in *Magic* to mention no more. I learned from her just how much unselfish playing can mean in a theatre and a company; how and why two performances that help each other will always be superior to purely individualist brilliance. I should like to take this opportunity to pay my tribute to a good actress and a good companion.

Another person to whom I owe an invaluable lesson is Mr. Milton Rosmer. He came as a guest-producer to Oxford to handle Ibsen’s “Ghosts.” It was one of the new season’s early productions, and J.B. had not yet decided that I was an actor after all. Nor indeed was it unreasonable to regard being stage-manager at the Playhouse as a whole-time job. I have said something of the theatre’s lack both of amenities and facilities. Mr. Rosmer arrived, full of enthusiasm about a new setting which he had designed for the Norwegian classic. I was equally enthusiastic, until I realised what it meant in sheer manual labour. It was not that the design was unpractical—it was not—or elaborate. It was simply that the required staff did not exist, and could not be procured. For a play to be dress-rehearsed at all it was necessary at the Playhouse to “strike” after the performance on Saturday night, and reset so that rehearsal could begin early on Sunday. Saturday night was accordingly the stage-manager’s bogey. On the Saturday night before *Ghosts* the bogey became nightmare. I had to tell Mr. Rosmer that I didn’t see how to get the resetting done. Mr. Rosmer’s simple and shatteringly effective reply was to take off his coat, roll up his shirt-sleeves, and give me a lead. I don’t suppose I have ever spent the smaller hours of the morning to better purpose. I learned that the producer who can merely shout through a megaphone—or a microphone for that matter—is almost as incompetent as a producer who merely drowns through rehearsals in one of the front rows of stalls. It may be that the importation of the American word “director” as equivalent to “producer” has given some producers false ideas of what their functions should be. In producing I believe that it is not enough just to give direction. There are occasions, vital occasions, when both actors and stage staffs need leadership. It is the producer’s business to supply it.

There was one more valuable lesson which I learned during my first season at the Playhouse. Oddly enough I learned it neither from J.B. nor from my fellow actors, but from my Mother! After the first four weeks J.B. had one of his delightful and enthusiastic impulses. He made up his mind that I was really an acting acquisition to the company. And I found myself set down to play some of the "leads." In general he was mistaken. I scraped through "*Bluntschli*" in *Arms and the Man* without active discredit. But it appalls me to think that I ever played "Dearth" in *Dear Brutus*. On the other hand I may as well admit that I quite fancied myself as "The Conjuror" in Chesterton's *Magic*. I loved the play. I revelled in the part. I liked wearing a cloak and faking conjuring tricks. And I thought I was pretty good. In general the Oxford papers seemed to agree with me. Inevitably, when I joined the company, comparisons had been drawn between me and John. Not unnaturally he had made of himself a considerable figure at the Playhouse during previous seasons. Such comparisons had not been actively unkind—but they had not been exactly flattering to me. My delight therefore can be imagined when one local paper referred to my performance in *Magic* in the following terms: "Mr. Gielgud's physical attributes inevitably remind us of his brother John. He is, however, a far finer and more subtle actor. . . ."

I could not help it: I sent the cutting to my Mother. I quote from the letter she wrote me in reply—entirely without her permission.

"I am of course delighted to read such a good notice of your performance in *Magic*. However, my dear boy, I would advise you not to believe everything you read in the newspapers."

I have not forgotten this admirable piece of advice. I don't . . .

At the time, however, I saw visions of a name in lights, and dreamed dreams of West End success. They faded as swiftly as they were born. Shortly after my second season at the Playhouse began, J.B. revised his opinion. I ceased to play "leads," most of which fell to the worthier hands of Alan Napier. And in the face of one of the recurring crises in the existence of the Oxford Repertory I found myself forced to try my luck elsewhere. I marched accordingly, with little conviction, to the assault—infiltration would probably be a better word—against the West End theatre.

Someone gave me a letter to Tommy Lovell, stage-manager of Wyndham's: rather deaf, irascible, and kind-hearted. A new play was going into rehearsal shortly at Wyndham's. Sir Gerald would be casting in a week or two. Meanwhile would I care to take the place of a "walking gentleman" who had fallen out of the cast of an American play that was just petering out? I certainly would. The piece was called *The Firebrand*. It starred Ivor Novello, Hugh Wakefield, Constance Collier, and Ursula Jeans, and dealt—in my youthful eyes



not very happily—with an episode in the career of Benvenuto Cellini. The author was American. The treatment farcical. My principal recollection of *The Firebrand* is connected neither with Mr. Novello's elegance nor Miss Jeans' beauty, but with that aspect of the scenery which did not face the audience. The settings had been brought over from the American production. And on every joist and backing strut were to be found the dessicated pieces of still adherent gum, which had presumably beguiled the leisure of the American cast. . . .

A few days before *The Firebrand* ended its run a dozen or so hopeful young men were lined up on the stage of Wyndham's for inspection and selection by Sir Gerald du Maurier for his new production. Why I was lucky enough to be chosen I do not know. Tommy Lovell may have put in a word. Personally—dare I confess it in the age of Democracy and Blimp?—I believe that my wearing of an Old Rugbeian tie may have had something to do with it. For the second time I had a letter to Sir Gerald from one of my relatives in my pocket. Once again I never presented it. Some idiotic notion of seeming to use an unfair advantage against my competitors, or of appearing conspicuous, held my hand. And perhaps, by blind chance, virtue, however idiotic, was rewarded. . . .

I must admit that in the selection of candidates for jobs I am immensely in favour of nepotism and favouritism. Within reason. I do not think it is a good thing to give man or woman a job which he or she is incompetent to handle, just because he or she is personally sympathetic, or the *protégé* of a friend. But, if the other qualifications of candidates are equal, it appears to me ridiculous to weight the scales *against* someone you find personally agreeable, or for whom you vouch people on whose judgment you rely. The letter of introduction, the personal commendation, should never be lightly given. Nor, I feel, should they be lightly disregarded. When I first joined the staff of the B.B.C. at Savoy Hill, a large number of appointments were made largely on personal introduction. In those days there was no great competition for broadcasting jobs, except among the foresighted. To-day there is a complex and ponderous machine designed most carefully to prevent any B.B.C. appointment from being other than impersonal in the extreme. All candidates must pass through the processes of this machine, and finally face an interviewing Board composed of a sufficiency of members to prevent any individual and possibly interested party from securing just the candidate he favours. Yet I fancy that there has been no notable improvement in the calibre of B.B.C. staff since the old days; and I would go so far as to hint that there are probably more square pegs in round holes than there used to be. But then I am prejudiced. I never leave an Interviewing Board without renewing my conviction that I would never have faced one successfully from the candidate's side of the table. I was intro-

duced into Savoy Hill by a friend, and my appointment was confirmed through an open door by someone who did not see my face. Such a procedure may have been slapdash. It has been replaced by one that is by no means foolproof—and by all means more disagreeable.

The new play at Wyndham's was Edgar Wallace's *The Ringer*. It was rumoured in the company that Frank Curzon had the gravest doubts about the piece's chances; and it is probable that its success was due almost as much to Sir Gerald's rewriting as to his production. To watch the latter in process was one of the most fascinating experiences I remember. It is the fashion nowadays to dismiss du Maurier as a lazy actor of immense natural talent; an exquisite opener of cigarette cases, and caresser of *ingénue* cheeks. While it is true enough that too often he appeared in parts which he could—and did—play "on his head," it was only necessary to see him produce for half an hour to realise that in professional accomplishment he could give points to any of his contemporaries. In *The Ringer* he was rehearsing Leslie Faber, Leslie Banks, Franklin Dyall, and Dorothy Dickson, apart from smaller fry. When he took their respective parts for purposes of production he promptly seemed to play one and all—including Miss Dickson—right off the stage. He was simultaneously quick, enormously inventive, patient and amusing. He obviously enjoyed the whole thing vastly—considerably more so, I should imagine, than Edgar Wallace. Behind his long cigarette-holder, the author's face occasionally wore a smile only to be called wry. He was learning, like most authors of plays, that what you see in the theatre is a creation astonishingly different from your conception through typewriter or dictaphone. But most midwives mangle. Du Maurier delivered—the goods.

Not for the first time I realised the essential topsy-turviness of the whole theatre business. The actor in rehearsal is not only worked hard. He is almost always overworked. Under some producers he is also sometimes overworked with fantastic lack of consideration, and to the accompaniment of explosions of ill-mannered bad temper. No Musicians' Union sets a term to his labours, or secures him overtime pay. Yet, during rehearsals and except the small-part players, he is not paid, and apparently thinks nothing of it. Given a part, on the other hand, in a successful play and a long run, the actor is, in comparison with most of the world's workers, a person of leisure. He can stay in bed all morning. However arduous the part itself, it cannot last longer than three hours a night. Mastery of technique obviates a large degree of what appears to an audience to be violent emotional or physical strain. Yet for this the actor is paid, and frequently overpaid. It is not so surprising if the actor's view of the world at large is sometimes not altogether a realistic one. . . .

It was certainly worth while to have the opportunity of watching

such actors as Leslie Faber and Leslie Banks at close quarters. But, all in all, I fear that the best part of a year at Wyndham's taught me a good deal less about acting than had two seasons at Oxford. My role—that of a standing policeman—was by no means arduous. Nor, with the best will in the world, could I ever appear convincing as a member of the Force. Henry Forbes, whom I understudied, was most obstinately healthy. During one week he took a holiday, and I played for him. But the part was not one in which the Thames could be fired. And Tommy Lovell frightened me so much before I went on that I was needlessly bad in a part that required little beyond an acceptable appearance. However, I went for it for all I was worth—and this included my "going for" Franklin Dyall, the villainous piano-playing solicitor, at the end of the first scene of the second act. I got one more lesson in technique when, while he writhed and gasped most convincingly under my frenziedly clutching hands, I suddenly became aware that he was whispering calmly and coldly, "Don't work so hard, you bloody young fool! You'll hurt one of us!" I tried to salve my wounded pride with the reflection that Ellen Terry had found it a handicap when she wept real tears so easily on the stage. . . .

It is probably true that for an actor to stay too long in repertory is a mistake; that for an actor to tour indefinitely in the provinces may well prove fatal. On the other hand understudying, and even the playing of a small part, during a long run in the West End is unlikely to do an actor much good, and may well do him a considerable amount of harm. I think it was during that year's run of *The Ringer* that I came to the conclusion that, unless you are pretty well at the top of the tree, the acting profession is not really a satisfactory one. I enjoyed that year as a personal experience. I met interesting, attractive, and agreeable people. The atmosphere of Wyndham's was friendly. But I knew very little more about acting at the end of the year than I had known at the beginning. And for someone with his way to make in the world I had far too much spare time on my hands. Fortunately for me—if unfortunately for Satan—I had by no means abandoned pen and typewriter when I took to the stage. And this period saw the beginning of my first published novel, and the writing of my first stage play. The former—*Black Gallantry*—had to wait until 1928 for completion, and publication by Michael Sadleir, who was apparently gratified that I had followed his advice. The latter was staged at the Court Theatre for two performances by a short-lived Sunday-producing Society called The Playmates. Appropriately, if unhappily, christened *Self* it was a jejune mixture of the would-be Pinerotic and Maughamesque. It was played for a good deal more than it was worth by Malcolm Keen, Jane Wood, and Tom Nesbitt. I was both flattered and enormously excited by its reception, and the

critics might reasonably have been much more unkind than they were. No doubt the wind was tempered to the newcomer. Inevitably the cast contained a lady of easy virtue, and in her two short scenes Naomi Jacob stole such acting honours as were.

"Micky"—as she insisted upon being called—was one of the cast of *The Ranger*. Although I care as little for her novels as she does for my political views, I think we have always been friends. Certainly during the run of *The Ranger* she was extremely kind to me. I was given the run of the dressing-room which she shared with Betty Hicks, and which came to be known as "St. Chad's" from the girlish gossip that continually echoed round its walls. Until it vanished as the result of enemy action, I cherished on one of my office walls a drawing made of me by Leslie Banks: sitting cross-legged in "St. Chad's," laying down the law too loudly, and closing every argument with an emphatic, "No, Micky—you're wrong!" Micky Jacob used to get very cross with me when I insisted on making use of a certain amount of specialised academic historical reading in our arguments. She would go so far as to say that I was a snob, and showing off the fact that I had been to Oxford. This, being about a third true, annoyed me extremely. But Micky Jacob on the Crippen Case—she had known and liked Belle Elmore and believed her a much-wronged woman—or on her memories of Marie Lloyd, was well worth listening to. Just as her performance of the fighting-drunk in *The Ranger* police-station scene was not only true but good.

Edgar Wallace was seldom far away from the theatre during the run. But I think other people have written of his boyish, and extremely attractive, pleasure in his own success. Of authors I have met, he and Eric Maschwitz alone have shared the ability to watch their own plays night after night, and to laugh more than whole-heartedly at their own jokes. My acquaintance with Wallace was of the slightest, though he was invariably friendly to the humblest member of one of his casts. But I remember one day lunching with him and Leslie Banks at a small restaurant just behind what was then Daly's, and is now the Warner Cinema. He was telling stories of his early days as a reporter. It appeared that on one occasion he managed to achieve admission to a prison on the morning of an execution, and through the friendly offices of the Governor, to see—not the actual hanging—but the grim procession from the condemned cell to the execution shed. This "nine o'clock walk" led across a tiny yard open to the sky, and it was raining. I shall never forget Wallace's description of the little group under the downpour—a downpour so heavy that the leaves of the prayer-book pulped and came away under the clergyman's thumb as he turned them while reading the Burial Service aloud. . . .

My brother John has written elsewhere of his debt to Leslie Faber's friendship and advice. I, too, owed him much: for the interest,

never even faintly tinged with patronage, he showed in a young man's enthusiasms and work; for invaluable precept and example. Personally—always allowing for the fact that I happen to be interested more in plays and in acting than in actors' personalities—I think Leslie Faber was the best player I have ever seen. "Never despise technique," he would say. "Then, once you have learned all the rules so well that your technique is automatic, you can break as many of them as you like." No doubt he lacked what is commonly called "star-quality." He persisted in the sinking of his individuality in his parts. English audiences, who like to recognise their favourites on their first appearance, and have an invincible prejudice against any careful study of their programmes, never quite gave his due to an actor who might be, and often was, unrecognisable from one role to another.

I remember well seeing Faber in two plays with a very short interval between productions. In the first, *The Sign on the Door*, he played an immaculate man-about-town, a delightfully villainous quintessence of "Arsène Lupin," "Raffles," and any modern Don Juan. In the second he played the husband of "Jane Clegg." I simply could not believe my eyes. Height, chin, walk, voice—they belonged to two different persons: persons from different worlds, with not even the shadow of a mannerism in common. This I conceive to be the art of acting in its purest form. But it is not necessarily the art of successful acting. Some years later I was to know well, work with, and admire an actress—Carol Goodner—who had this same virtue, and whose career suffered in precisely the same way. In her case critics, who greatly admired her work, would comment with semi-humorous reproach, on the difficulties placed in their way by Miss Goodner's "chameleon-like" propensities. They complained that she was never the same girl for two performances together! And I think that anyone who saw the blonde bombshell of *Dinner at Eight*, the elegant *comédienne* of *Heroes Don't Care*, the drab earthy housewife of *It Walks by Night*, the Manet-like "Masha" in the St. Denis production of *The Three Sisters*, would agree. It was not that either Leslie Faber or Carol Goodner lacked personality. On the contrary. But they were actors first, and exhibitionists second. And in a star-ridden theatre it is inevitably the exhibitionists who take first place. Which is probably quite as it should be if, in fact, the public is always right. . . .

At the end of the run of *The Ringer* I found myself in something of a quandary. On the one hand Edgar Wallace had been nice enough to promise me a small part in *The Squeaker*, when it should be produced. On the other I was, as usual, chronically hard up. There were the delays so inevitably connected with all theatrical productions, and I felt, probably unwisely, that I could not afford to wait. So I took a job with a touring company, and got my first experience of the

provinces. The part was a fair one, as supporting parts go. The play was a sophisticated modern comedy of bad manners. For the most part the tour ranged agreeably over west and south-coast towns, which were pleasant enough against a summer background. None the less, after the first novelty of the experience wore off, I found touring infinitely tedious, and very nearly actively demoralising. Once again I found myself lucky in having my writing to fall back upon. Without it I could not have failed to take to drink or the drearier forms of casual vice. One had too little to do—and in consequence suffered consistently from "cameelious hump." The same in various degrees was true of one's companions. And the result was that in a very few weeks people, who were by nature friendly and pleasant, became touchy, irritable, and got thoroughly on each other's nerves. It may have been enlightening, but it was not uplifting to be introduced to so much petty gossip—relating for the most part as to who was, or might soon be, living with whom; to so many mean streets and stuffy tea-shops; to the *genus* theatrical landlady, who is by no means always the motherly and golden-hearted person created by novelists; to the intolerable tedium of Sunday railway journeys, accompanied invariably by the playing of *vingt-et-un* for farthing points. Yet it would not be fair to omit from the account the fact that when I was ill in Glasgow one of my fellow-actors, looked after me with the greatest consideration and kindness, while our landlady, if she did not "mother," yet did most effectively "nurse". . . .

It was of course valuable experience to act to different sorts of audiences in varying-sized theatres from one week to the next. It was good to be made to realise that London is not England, and that the West End of London is not the be-all and end-all of the theatre. But, taken all round, the tour seemed to me depressing and unprofitable. The local theatrical managers seemed to lack alike courage and conviction. One found in them neither wish nor determination to cope with the problem of competition with the brand-new cinema across the road, with its comfortable plush-bottomed seats, and the darkness and composure which accompanied the latest Hollywood products. The discomfort and grubbiness of provincial theatres both in front and behind stage were hideous. The attitude to the customer seemed deplorably akin to "Take it or Leave it." It was not very surprising that so often the customer left it, preferring the Odeon, where his vanity was flattered and his comfort considered and all at less cost to his pocket. Forty years ago, of course, things were very different. The actor-managers made their provincial tours as a matter of course. And the Odeon did not exist. I believe, too, that since the circumstances of the Second Great War drove a number of leading players and first-class productions "into the country," the provincial theatres have once more begun to look up and take notice. But at the period of which

I am writing the average offering at the ordinary provincial theatre was any play that could be labelled as "from a West End Theatre," with a second-rate cast—only too often perfunctorily rehearsed from his London prompt-book by a stage manager—and lamentably cheap settings and dresses. The axiom that there could be nothing of genuine excellence about the whole business could not fail to be profoundly bad both for players and audience. I was forced rapidly to the conclusion that if touring provided both experience and a living, yet it emphatically could not offer a career.

It was therefore in a pretty gloomy frame of mind that I returned to London when the tour came to an end. The notion of an infinite vista of visits to agents' offices in search of a new job was appalling. Such visits always for me approximated nearly to those other visits to persons of unsympathetic disposition behind formidable barriers of desk: visits when I had been trying to sell typewriters or books. I found it equally if not more embarrassing and difficult to sell myself.

However, once again the good offices of personal friendship did not fail me. Among my cuttings—mostly faded and ill-printed cuttings from provincial papers—I find three from the *Radio Times* of August and September 1927. They remind me that in those months I visited Savoy Hill for the first time, and that I gave three talks: one on "Modern Manners"; one on "Habits and Hobbies"; and a travel-talk on the City of Warsaw. Like most other people at that time I thought of broadcasting as little more than a subject for tiresome jokes, usually connected with cats' whiskers. I was interested by my first experience of a microphone. I was grateful for my guineas. But I did not take the matter at all seriously.

I could not have been very much more mistaken.

## CHAPTER VI

### ROUND AND ABOUT THE THEATRE

\* It has become a platitude to say of the English Theatre that it is dying. This is unfortunate—not because it is true. It is not. But it has become pretty generally accepted, and the atmosphere of a death-bed is hardly likely to conduce towards entertainment. Genuine demise, as opposed to the grim process of dying, would be preferable. It is impossible to look for resurrection until death has taken place.

It may be worth while to consider why and how this platitude has come to be accepted. And, curiously enough, it is accepted with little or no protest from the people most vitally concerned: actors,

---

\* This was written before the astonishing boom-period of 1945-46.

authors, and theatrical managers. Too many of them seem to feel that pity for a hopeless invalid will produce better houses than enthusiasm for a vitally flourishing art-form. More curiously still, in my belief, those chiefly responsible for the point of view are precisely those people who might reasonably be expected most energetically to repudiate it : people whose business it is in part to ensure that the theatre remains alive : people who are, as a rule, genuine enthusiasts for the theatre ; to wit, the Critics.

I know to my cost that it is both unwise and unprofitable to cross swords with a critic. Not only can he be sure of having the last word, he is also likely to be a skilled professional controversialist. That is part of his business. None the less it seems to me that any kind of survey of the contemporary stage would be altogether incomplete, were the critics' part in it to be omitted. They must surely agree that their responsibility is a considerable one.

First of all, then, there are critics—and reporters. That is presumably the fault not of the critics themselves, but of their editors.



Mr. Gielgud

*(One reason why authors should not appear before the curtain on first nights)*

But unless I misread the last volume of Mr. Agate's Diaries, I have his support in believing that the mere reporting of a play is not criticism at all. And Mr. Agate should know. Such reporting is a barren activity as far as helping to vitalise the theatre is concerned. There



is too much of it, and in newspapers worthy of better things according to both their reputations and circulations. Nor is even this barren activity always done well or even competently. For the daily newspaper it is as a rule a matter of more concern to give space to cinema films. Film companies are more generous with advertisements. Films have wider popular appeal. As a result, only too often a journalist, already worn and disillusioned by weeks of film reporting, will be assigned to cover plays during his spare evenings. Whatever his professional integrity, he is unlikely to visit the theatre in an enthusiastic, nay even in a charitable frame of mind. Such a writer seldom has the necessary background knowledge to turn out more than a flat and compressed *resumé* of the plot, mildly flavoured perhaps by some personality gossip concerning one of the more glamorous members of the cast. As criticism it does not exist. Even as advertisement it is inadequate. If the editor of the popular daily newspaper is interested in the art and the well-being of the theatre, he must overhaul his staff—and possibly increase it by a theatrical expert.

The critics will inevitably retort that, granted that reporting is not criticism, this indictment cannot apply to them. That is true. But just as there are critics and reporters, so there are critics—and critics. It is now roughly twenty-five years since I became a consistent theatre-goer. During the last fifteen of those twenty-five I must have been to almost as many plays as the critics themselves. It has been one of my professional duties to do so. During that length of experience I have been increasingly struck by two things: the persistence of "stars," and the persistence of critics. Many of the names which drew me into the pit as a schoolboy still head bills, and will no doubt, in the future. Similarly critics—unless they are so unfortunate as to die—seem determined to imitate Tennyson's famous brook. Their devotion may be worthy of applause. Is it unfair or unkind to suggest that in this field also there can be too much of a good thing? However enthusiastic for plays and players he may be, however brilliant or knowledgeable his background, a critic must, after a term of years and by the very nature of things, incline to staleness, if not to weariness. He loses elasticity of mind. He tends with deepening middle age towards nostalgia, and the making of regretful and unflattering comparisons with his heroes and heroines of the past. He may well become physically jaded, or emotionally surfeited. He may even achieve that vast tolerance and breadth of view which renders criticism a vain thing. He may represent his own point of view more clearly. He will certainly represent the normal playgoer less and less. He is liable to convert agreeable personal idiosyncracies into tiresome mannerisms; to flog his personal hobby-horses—his prejudices in favour of or against certain authors, players, and schools of acting—almost beyond his readers' endurance. Ultimately he may

come to the stage when the veteran critic of the stage is, alas, incapable of criticising himself. . . .

I would, therefore, with all diffidence, suggest the desirability of a retiring age for critics, or, perhaps better still, some definition—reasonably elastic—of the length of their appointment. The English have a notable, and for the most part admirable, respect for old age. The progress of Mr. Bernard Shaw from *enfant terrible* to "Grand Old Man" is the outstanding example in contemporary life. The influence of old men, who are also public figures, is tremendous. It may sometimes be rather disproportionate. And in the case of a critic it may not invariably be asserted on the side of the angels. When, in addition to his established column, a critic can rely on the veneration and respect properly accorded to the opinion of old age, he may risk dangerous inflation of his ego.

Another vice to which most critics of the theatre seem oddly prone is that of making, as it were, sentimental allowances for particular organisations. The Old Vic, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford, the O.U.D.S., come most readily to my mind as examples. All three are admirable institutions. None of them but would have been the better, from time to time, for feeling the chill wind of criticism untempered. Perhaps it is a little unfair to class the Vic with the other two. \* For years its struggle was uphill. Always its motives have remained above reproach. The personality of Lilian Bayliss could not but demand admiration. And if, in this instance, criticism was almost without exception friendly and occasionally idolatrous, criticism was only proving for once representative of the audience. For two things abide outstanding among memories of performances at the Vic: the incredible number of cups of tea consumed by, and the immutable enthusiasm of, the audiences. Productions might be good, bad, or indifferent. Players might be first-rate, competent, or just plain bad. The shrill and heart-felt audience reaction remained constant. And who am I to maintain even for an instant that their cheers were vain?

The cases of Stratford and the O.U.D.S. are a different story. I doubt if uncritical appreciation of the latter did much harm, except that a few young men took to the stage as a profession, who would have had more hope of success or of a competence in some quiet and unobtrusive Civil Service niche; while some people wondered why these brilliant young Hamlets and Romeos seemed with such persistency to belie promise with performance when they had exchanged Oxford for London.

On the other hand, if there was ever a case where brutal, frank, and straightforward criticism was needed, and never achieved, that case

---

\* It certainly is, since the Olivier-Richardson seasons at the New Theatre.

was Stratford.\* No question here of refraining from adding to the difficulties of a theatre striving to make both ends meet ; of a natural inclination to encourage rather than depress the enthusiastic and the young. Here was a clear case of national prestige, and theatrical prestige. Here lay the possibility of the making of an English Bayreuth about the birthplace of the greatest Englishman. Yet we have never in our time seen a Stratford Festival other than second-rate. And we have never read notices of a Stratford Festival that candidly pointed out the fact. It was left to one of the Memorial Theatre's producers to frame the indictment. And even after that it seems to have been generally agreed to let sleeping dogs lie. If all was well at Stratford there would be no actor in England who would not feel honoured to take part in the Festival. How many of the country's leading players of Shakespeare ever appear there ? And when it has been felt desirable to drop a spice of novelty into the proceedings, Shakespeare has been handed for butchery to a foreign producer to make a Stratford Holiday. I yield to no one in my admiration for the work of such producers as M. Komisarjevsky, and M. Michel Saint-Denis. Indeed, I am inclined to think that the latter's handling of *The Three Sisters*, and of *Noé*, gave me more pleasure than any experience in the theatre that I can remember. But I remain bewildered by the fact that a faintly deprecating reference to M. Komisarjevsky's production of *King Lear* in the course of a lecture delivered at Birmingham brought me once within measurable distance of physical violence. Multitudinous steps, kaleidoscopic lighting—and the sacred aura of the Birthplace of the Bard, had completely and successfully bemused the Midlands. Not so the actors. One veteran, indeed, was heard pleading impassionedly " to play just one scene on a flat bit of stage on my own flat feet ! " Yet the only company whose notices could hope to vie with those of Stratford were the Canterbury Old Stagers. And in the environment of Cricket and Cathedral critics might plead with classic reasonableness *non semper tendit arcum Apollo*, while they enjoyed the celebrated Epilogues.

It seems to me that this problem of criticism is a far more urgent matter in England than it is, for example, in New York. There, ironically enough, criticism is a far more sharp-edged thing. But in New York the theatrical audience is in no doubt about its standards ; makes no bones about making up its mind. It does not boo. It does not hiss. It quietly walks out. In London the audience requires a critically informed lead. It is by nature friendly, and quite infinitely tolerant. The ferociously hostile reception given to Mr. Coward's *Sirocco* was so comparatively unique as to remain outstanding in stage history. And on that occasion the audience was not critical but

\* Such criticism has at last recently been launched—only to be resented furiously by players and management alike.

hysterical. It is, however, difficult for critics to secure the respect that is their right, when one of them can write of a play produced not so long ago that "few of the actors knew their lines, and the majority of them were inaudible: the play was admirably produced." That is not farce but fact.

Mention of New York, incidentally, reminds me of another advantage of the theatre in the United States. In New York at any rate it seems that the staging of a play remains accepted as invariably something of a gamble—as, indeed, it should be anywhere. Plays are produced, fail, and disappear again often with bewildering rapidity. No-one expects otherwise. Their authors and players are, of course, disappointed, being human. They are not made to feel, as they frequently are in London, that to have been associated with a theatrical failure is almost as bad as being accessory to a criminal offence. Play-producing is not, cannot be, and should not be a copper-bottomed commercial proposition without risk. The success-formula of to-night is the almighty flop of six months later. Without the element of chance and the unexpected, half the fascination of work in and for the theatre disappears. To produce plays because other plays of similar type have made fortunes; to produce a play because it has already made a great hit in New York; these are no doubt praiseworthy activities from the strictly business point of view. But the theatre ought not to be a strict business. It ought to be an adventure. There is more rejoicing in the theatrical heaven over one daring and bankrupt management that tries its luck again, than over any persistence of satisfactory dividends. From the point of view of the theatre's ultimate good, the individual who seeks only to make money out of it would do better to make a change to banking, the selling of groceries, or the insurance business.

However the principal handicap of the legitimate theatre in England is the simple fact that the Englishman's real theatre is the music-hall. He is interested in and fascinated by virtuosity, not by technique; by personality, not by plays. He will accept a play on a serious subject by Mr. Shaw, because he can count on Mr. Shaw to make him laugh. He will go and see a play by Shakespeare on the condition that the pill of listening to blank verse is gilded by the "star-quality" of the principal player. And Shakespeare, superb man of the theatre that he was—and remains for all that footnotes and dons can do—took care that his principal parts gave actors every opportunity to display virtuosity. It has never seemed quaint or inappropriate to English audiences to sandwich a sketch or monologue by distinguished actors between a conjuror and a pack of performing sea-lions; to follow a red-nosed comedian or two trick-cyclists with a pianist of international reputation—so long as the latter confines himself to the more garish works of Liszt. Brilliance of execution, attraction of sheer personality, are the factors that count. Whence arises the "star" system,

with all its glories, its great names, and its very evil influence.

It is occasionally said that if the present generation could see the Victorian giants of the stage, and Henry Irving in particular, it would recoil with distaste from his mannerisms, and dismiss him as an unregenerate "ham." Myself I do not believe it. I have heard so much, not unnaturally, of Irving from my parents that I feel almost as if I had seen him act. I believe that his personality would enthral, fascinate and appal me, as it enthralled, fascinated and appalled them. That I never in fact saw Irving act in Shakespeare is one of my most poignant regrets. But I do sometimes wonder whether to-day even Irving could have "got away" with most of his other plays—with Wills's *Charles I.*, with the pantomime *Faust*, with the adaptation of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, with *The Locked Chest*. I have read, or tried to read all these plays, and many others of the great days of the Lyceum. They prove Irving to have been a magnificent actor, and a splendid judge of parts to suit himself and Ellen Terry. They also prove that he cared not a straw for the content, or for the artistic level of such plays. And why should lesser stars strive to outshine the greatest? The star-actor seeks accordingly for opportunities—not for plays.

I am not pretending for an instant that much of the greatest pleasure derived from, much of the finest artistry displayed in the theatre, has not been due to the work of great actors with outstanding personalities. But Bernard Shaw is as important to the theatre as Henry Irving. In fact more so, because Shaw's work endures, while the actor's cannot but be evanescent. And the equivalent of Irving does not in practice seek nor encourage the equivalent of Shaw. Can the gulf be bridged? Is it just possible that that much-abused individual the producer has a real function after all?

My great-uncle Fred Terry—who incidentally failed to achieve the success his talents deserved owing to his persistent preference for third-rate plays—once said of producers, "Good God! I don't want some young whipper-snapper telling me whereabouts to stand on a stage! I know where I want to stand, and where my public wants me to stand: dead centre!" He said it with a twinkle in his eye. But I fancy that he meant most of it. And I believe that could some producer have persuaded him to play "Falstaff" instead of *The Borderer* and *The Marlboroughs* both he and the English theatre would have been gainers.

I have already mentioned that most perfect of modern productions: Michel Saint Denis' *The Three Sisters*. Among all its excellences nothing was more interesting than the way in which the producer subdued and welded a cast of individually distinguished players into a whole: a whole for once recognised as infinitely more important than its parts. I am naturally diffident about handing unsolicited tributes to my

brother John, lest they seem either fulsome or patronising. But in my view, for what little it is worth, his persisting policy of surrounding himself with first-rate casts, has been of as much value to the Theatre as have been any of his notable interpretations of classic parts. Few acknowledged stars have shown the same wisdom in refusing to shine by comparison with their supporting players, though the new organisation of the Old Vic Company seems to evidence the value of a good example . . . .

But I should like to return to the question of the "producer," in which I cannot help but be particularly and personally interested. There are as a rule two attitudes adopted towards him. Either he is a tin god, big or little according to capacity. Or he is a mixture of needless luxury and unmitigated nuisance. Both views appear to me extreme. In my normal playgoer's capacity I have little use for the producer who splashes his own personality all over the play, probably distorting it for the sake of his own *idées fixes*, or even in some lamentable cases his own amusement. The best production is always unobtrusive. The best producer is not by any means the noisiest. A producer should not tackle a play with the object of showing his admirers what he—as opposed to lesser men—can do with it. Surely it is true that irrespective of the medium—stage, screen or microphone—the two essentials of good production are patience and commonsense, with particular emphasis on commonsense. No amount of ingenuity applied to the invention of "business," no deep subtlety of psychological characterisation, compensate for allowing actors to be inaudible, or scenes to be invisible. Unlike children, plays should both be seen and heard. This desirable combination should always be the producer's main objective. Only when he has attained it is he entitled to add the trimmings of elaboration.

Having watched a good many producers at work in the theatre I am inclined to believe that too many direct rehearsals too consistently from too far forward in the stalls. To do so is most misleading as far as both grouping and audibility is concerned. I know that it is difficult to control rehearsals from the acuter angles of upper circles. But the producer should remember Job's Satan, and emulate his habit of going to and fro, and walking up and down. To produce from the point of view of the first half-dozen rows of stalls may be more comfortable. But it was Ellen Terry who recalled the value of her early training when she was told "to plaster her voice on the back wall of the gallery." It is a lesson that most producers can afford to pass on to most actors. To do so they must visit the gallery.

But in spite of the fact that there are producers pretentious, and producers lazy, I doubt if it is possible to make out a satisfactory case against the producer as such.\* If it is difficult to achieve any proper

---

\* Mr Agate, of course, has tried.

perspective of a play from the stalls, it is certainly out of the question to do so from the stage. The actor cannot know what he looks like, nor how his voice registers. The actor is also inclined to be far more interested in his part than in the play. Apart from a very natural vanity, I think that this attitude has grown up from the practise of issuing actors with "parts" instead of scripts. Economically it may be justifiable. Practically I believe it to be disastrous. I have known more than one actor accept a part on the strength of its number of pages and apparent effectiveness, with but the haziest notion of what the play was really about. And while it is possible to learn lines from last-word cues only, the result is to produce a parrot-like rendering altogether separable from any mental process. Therefore there must be an individual to co-ordinate, to explain, to temper the over-emphasis of the actor and the over-anxiety of the author; to study mood, and atmosphere, and *tempo*; to stimulate and to contrive. Call him "producer," "director," what you will, he must exist. But while he should direct and direct with certainty and authority, he should not dictate. And he should never ignore, though he need never adopt, suggestion.

There has grown up a tradition about both eminent actors and producers that they are often "difficult." And lips are licked in corners over cocktails about temperamental leading ladies, scenes at rehearsals indefinitely more dramatic than the scenes of the play being rehearsed, and directorial antics which if displayed by normal human beings would be regarded as mere bad manners. I believe most of this to be invented humbug. Actors and producers are subject to human frailties like other people. The conditions of their work are liable to be trying. And they are unlikely to have chosen their profession—they are most unlikely to have achieved any success in it—without being rather beyond the ordinary sensitive, and including in their make-up a considerable proportion of egocentricity. Actors have been known to crack back at directors; leading ladies have flounced off the stage in the course of rehearsals; directors have been seen jumping on their hats and heard apostrophising the Almighty in more than one language. But for the most part the ammunition is strictly blank, the explosion all part of the day's work and strictly understood as such. Since the private lives of players and backstage activities have become "news," this aspect of theatrical activities has been monstrously overwritten and exaggerated. And from my own experience I would add this: that in sixteen years of broadcasting production I have never experienced a "scene" with any actor or actress of genuine talent. Again and again I have approached my first rehearsal with a "star" hitherto unknown to me with nervousness bordering upon dread. Kind acquaintances have warned me of his or her "impossibility." And, being myself of the type that shrinks from unpleasant-

ness and feels virtue go out of him with anger, I have felt that I would have gladly exchanged the studio for the scaffold! Invariably such fears were unjustified. It may be, of course, that a broadcasting producer was too insignificant a target for a temperamental broadside. But I do not think so. People reach the first flight of any profession by the exercise of hard work, common-sense, good manners, and making the best use of the materials with which they have to work. They usually add to all this a considerable knowledge of how to handle other people. An actress may achieve considerable publicity by getting a reputation for screaming the theatre down, or hurling pots of grease-paint about her dressing-room. She may get publicity also by being personally disreputable. I very much doubt if the results of such publicity upon her career will prove satisfactory in the long run. Actors and producers are mutually dependent for their success. Good actors and good producers know that they won't get what they want by indulging in dog-fights, however picturesque. It is important not to confuse the cart with the horse. Because a number of successful players lunch or dine in a certain fashionable restaurant, less successful players complain bitterly that plays are only cast from that restaurant's *habitués*. Because some "stars" have been known to be casual in their amours, jokes—are current about "the casting-couch." It may be dreary, it has never been more true, that in the English theatre at any rate the ingredients of success—natural talent aside—are hard work and commonsense.

I believe most firmly that unpleasantness—when it does occur between actors and producers—takes place in nine cases out of ten between the actor who is not as talented as he believes himself to be, and the producer who is endeavouring to cloak lack of competence with too emphatic a display of self-assurance. For the young and inexperienced producer genuine self-confidence is very hard to achieve. When I began to produce plays first for the British Broadcasting Corporation I was well under thirty, and for all practical purposes unknown in the world of the theatre. I am unlikely to forget the effort it cost me to face established stage personalities, whom for years I had envied and admired "from the front," and begin to give them direction. As a proceeding it seemed to me inevitably both superfluous and impertinent. And certainly I shall never forget how much I owe to the kindness and forbearance of those elders and betters who enabled me to change my point of view: two of them in particular.

Henry Ainley had been one of my private idols ever since I had seen him, wearing little more than a leopard-skin in the first act of the Shakespeare Tercentenary performance at Drury Lane, playing "Mark Antony" in *Julius Cæsar*. His superb physical presence, the magnificence of his voice, the splendour of his personality, were stamped upon my imagination, and persisted in my memory. That I should



ever give such a man direction seemed as unlikely and as improper as if I should suddenly find myself teaching Homer to the headmaster of Rugby. Yet, when in my early days at Savoy Hill I first encountered Mr. Ainley I met with not only an exquisite courtesy and friendliness, but also with an attitude which implied that he believed that in spite of all probability and appearances I could be helpful to him; that he welcomed whatever I might be able to offer.

Then there was Miss Dorothy Dickson. She had been the first leading lady of *The Ringer*, in which I had been an unconsidered understudy. I fear there was a certain element of schoolboyish malice in my determination, when I had the opportunity, to include *The Ringer* among the plays I was to broadcast; and to engage as many of the original players as were available. I suppose that in fact I was trying to console myself for my failure as an actor by insisting to people who had witnessed that failure that I had after all achieved some small niche of importance and authority. And then when it came to the point of the first "read-through" of the play I could hardly screw myself up to the point of entering the studio. I went in feeling the most unhappy combination of cad and worm—to be greeted by Miss Dickson as if we had been old friends. No one could have dreamed, from her attitude to her producer, that she must have known far, far more about the play than he ever could. . . .

I can only remember having two real quarrels with actors in sixteen years. Neither was a "star." Neither is a "star" to-day—and I would bet a large proportion of my current bank account that neither ever will become a "star." Both were extremely promising actors. Both made the mistake of believing that they had nothing to learn.

I doubt if I can usefully contribute to the persistent argument as to whether the general standard of acting has been raised or lowered during the last two decades. I am inclined to think that it has been raised. The acknowledged heads of the profession are to-day reasonably young men, who know that individual personality is not quite enough, and that good team-work is helpful not only to a play, but to the leading players as well. What seems to be far more serious a threat to the theatre is the quite obvious declension of the quality of plays produced, and the lack of up-and-coming writers of quality.

For this state of affairs the managements must accept responsibility and indeed a certain amount of blame. The playwright, of all types of writers, is the most unhappily situated in that he cannot learn his business without co-operation—and complex co-operation at that—from other people. The novelist, or the poet, can sit in his cottage or his garret with his pens, ink and paper, and write. If he takes the job seriously as a job, writes a regular number of words a day, does not idle away weeks at a time waiting for inspiration—most fickle and treacherous of Muses—he will, always assuming that he has any natural

talent, be bound to learn the elements of his craft. Not so the writer of plays. If he does not see his work on the stage he cannot learn how to improve it. He needs to see actors move, and to hear actors speak lines. He needs to get the "feel" of a play's movement and development. He vitally needs experience of audience reaction. He requires to know what can be left to production, and the limitations of production. It is immensely helpful if he can learn a little of lighting and scenic problems. But, unless a young playwright is unusually fortunate, or outstandingly talented, his chance of such education and experience are limited in the extreme. I have always wondered why managements of standing and large resources do not find it worth their while to run small theatres, either in the outskirts of London, the seaside towns, or the larger provincial centres, in which not only their younger players, but their younger authors of promise can be given working experience.\*



John and Val Gielgud, Marie Tempest, Ivor Novello and Noel Coward were all at the show last evening

Before the present War there existed at least the various Sunday-night producing societies to give the unknown playwright his chance. (Though indeed most of them started as artistic experiments, from which they were lured by Mammon into becoming forcing-houses or try-out stages for commercialism.) To such societies—the Stage Society, the Repertory Players, the Play Actors, to mention three of the best-known—and to such theatres as the Q, the Embassy, and the Arts Theatre Club, the debt of the theatre was immense, and the debt of the would-be playwright greater still. But the chances offered by such producing agencies were often dearly bought. I can speak with some experience, for out of my six plays I have had four produced for the first time on a Sunday night by various societies. I admit gladly that I vastly enjoyed the experiences. I hope that I profited. I think

---

\* There have recently been certain promising moves in this direction.

I am doing the plays little injustice when I add that I consider myself lucky in having had them produced at all. But they all alike suffered from the same disadvantages inseparable from that type of theatrical activity. They were seriously under-rehearsed. Their casts were changed about with kaleidoscopic and bewildering rapidity, and were often chosen in the first instance by a committee. Their settings were sketchy. And their audience was a special as opposed to a general one. It would be absurd and ungrateful to complain of conditions inherent in the most difficult practical working of such productions. But to pretend that they gave the plays the best possible chance would be to shut one's eyes to the facts. With the outbreak of war the societies ceased to function. The Embassy closed.\* Only Q and the Arts Theatre Club remain.

Yet on the unknown writer, his discovery, encouragement, and education depends the whole future of the theatre. You cannot keep the industry going on classic revivals and American successes alone. Even Mr. Shaw cannot last for ever. And Mr. Coward seems to look more and more towards the film studios, and Mr. Priestley towards the Houses of Parliament. True, Miss McCracken has grasped firmly the torch relinquished from across the Atlantic by Miss Dodie Smith. True, the critics have discovered that Mr. Peter Ustinov is unusually intelligent for a young man. There has always been something about those queer Russians. . . . But at the time of writing (winter, 1944) the output of good native original dramatic work is hardly encouraging. Tyrone Guthrie is so daring as to team an early Shaw with his classics; John Gielgud as to add a middle-period Maugham to his. Can it be that there are no new writers of plays? That they are all bought up straight from school to embellish film-scripts with additional dialogue? That they have nothing to say? Or that the managements cannot, or will not understand their language? †

I feel occasionally that an approach to the solution of this most serious problem might be achieved, if managements could be persuaded to be more business-like in the matter of reading plays submitted to them; if, as a corollary, they would admit as an axiom that each play-script submitted is hypothetically a piece of valuable property, to be treated accordingly. I am consistently astonished, and often appalled, by the levity with which managements treat scripts, whose mere typing and binding costs should entitle them to respect and care. I remember once at the Oxford Playhouse opening a cupboard somewhere behind the scenes. On its shelves lay a pile of plays—several dozen at least. They were tattered and thick with dust. How many hopes, longings, and expectations must have lain buried in that dusty and forgotten tomb! Yet, when I mentioned my discovery to J. B.

\* It has re-opened with a policy both vital and interesting under Mr. Antony Hawtrey's direction.

† Here too there has lately been considerable promise of better things.

Fagan he seemed unmoved and disinterested. At the time I was shocked. I imagined a work of my own somewhere in the middle of that pile. Since then I have seen similar piles, both inside and outside cupboards in practically every managerial office into which I have penetrated. (Too often, alas, also in the dressing-rooms of many actors!) Each time I write a play I have six copies of it typed. Within a fortnight they have all disappeared. And to get a copy back is like the drawing of an impacted wisdom tooth.

It is, of course, true that many plays are submitted in a form that does credit neither to their authors' intelligence nor *savoir-faire*. I have been sent plays for broadcasting written in long-hand on pieces of thick cardboard; plays that would last for five hours; plays that would require the resources of a Pharaoh or a Tsar of All the Russias. I have been shown stage-plays whose casts included "not more than two elephants," and which required staging in seven acts. I know that the persisting business of reading plays becomes a mighty weariness both to the eye and the flesh. But the job has to be done. And it needs organisation and *expertise*. To hand the scripts of plays to odd friends and relatives, and the office-boy, in the hope of finding out from such opinions the chances of popular success is merely idiotic. It entirely ignores the inability of the untrained eye to visualise a play in performance from a typed set of pages. Yet it is done again and again. Play-readers are neither, as a rule, sufficiently well educated, sufficiently well-paid, nor sufficiently authoritative in their judgments. Plays are read in odd fragments by managers—and by actors—in trains and cars, in odd scenes over a week-end, in an office where the reader is continually interrupted by the telephone and the interview. How invariably is the rule broken that a play should always be read straight through at a sitting, if it is to be at all adequately appraised!

Further, there is the steady contraction of the market. It is sometimes held as a reproach to the B.B.C. that if an author writes a play for broadcasting and it is rejected, there is the end of his play. He has no alternative market. There is some substance in this inevitable result of a monopoly—a result which is, I hope, balanced by certain equivalent advantages. But the theatre market is steadily shrinking also. Apart from certain mushroom growths, the main producing firms tend both to expand and to interlock their activities. I have been continually assured by their representatives that they yearn night and day for the sight of any new play that has promise. The number of new plays they produce—the time they take to read scripts of new plays submitted to them—hardly bears out this contention. Young authors must eat, and most young authors are without private means. Many of them are standing out with the greatest difficulty against the temptation to abandon artistic and creative work in favour

of the security of a settled job—a temptation only too often underwritten by worldly-wise parents. It is not therefore surprising that the young author should so frequently turn his back on the stage in disappointment and despair. If he writes an even tolerably promising novel he can be pretty sure of publication. In the short-story market he can scrape a living. With some luck he may make big money in the service of a film company. Only in the theatre is he expected to master a most difficult and specialised craft with neither encouragement nor assisted training. And the more original his approach to the theatre, the more difficult that approach is made.

I have drawn attention to these, the gloomier aspects of the theatre scene at the present time, partly because I am by nature critical and inclined to pessimism; partly because theatre-lovers are incurably sentimental in their repudiation of such a point of view. I believe it to be the truth that what is fundamentally wrong is a general failure on the part of the representatives of the theatre to move sufficiently rapidly with the times. If the theatre falls into a slump period, the public is adjured that it is its duty to support a noble institution. And the arguments vary from the statement that it is the duty of every civilised person to support an important art-form, to the plea that it is a shame for the public to go so much to the cinema and so little to the theatre. The theatre has got to adapt itself to the tendencies of the civilisation which it in some sort represents, and of which it is a part. It has got to broaden its base. It has got to stand on its own feet. It has got to *compel* respect and appreciation—and satisfactory box-office figures, as opposed to pleading, often rather querulously, for these things as rights. It has got to be practical in a materialist age; and yet preserve good taste, if only as a matter of very necessary prestige. It should hold out the hand of co-operation both to the cinema and to broadcasting. At present, at least as far as the latter is concerned, the attitude of the theatre varies from one of obsequious entreaty for advertisement when times are bad, to one of completely selfish isolationism when times are good. While for theatrical managements to permit actors to film all day before rushing from studios to stage for an evening performance is crazy in theory, and disastrous, if not actually dishonest, in practise.

There is no lack of acting talent in the English Theatre today. But much managerial policy tends to be both timid and conservative, some criticism to be amateurish, indulgent and nostalgic, playwriting to be out of touch with the burning questions of the day and age.\* Such are the conclusions of a reasonably prejudiced observer! That most prevalent of contemporary evils, a sentimental complacency, has been rotting the theatre at its roots. Its exorcisation was almost overdue, when so comparatively recently it began.

---

\* This last is no longer true, to mention *Exercise Bowler* and *Frieda* if no others.

## CHAPTER VII

### SAVOY HILL

It was on May 28th, 1928, that I joined the staff of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and crossed the threshold of Savoy Hill in the capacity of assistant to the then Editor of the *Radio Times*. I am happy to recall that there had been some competition for my services. It might perhaps be more strictly true to say that two very good friends of mine were both anxious for my welfare—and perhaps both thought that the amenities of their work would be increased by my official society. Lance Sieveking urged my intelligence upon Roger Eckersley, at that time Director of Programmes. Eric Maschwitz murmured of my merits into the ear of Gladstone Murray, Director of Public Relations. I think it is no libel to say that in those far-off days at any rate Programmes—unlike Spring—were far behind Public Relations! British Broadcasting has always, in my opinion, suffered from the tendency of the engineering or administrative tail to wag the programme dog. No doubt there were and are good reasons. But the effect upon programmes and programme prestige has been to an extent unhappy. It was the smallest straw in this particular wind, when Maschwitz overcame Sieveking in the contest for my person.

I shall have more to say of Sieveking, when I come to write of the development of the radio play: a development to which his contribution was by no means negligible, and largely misunderstood. Suffice it to say here that he accepted his disappointment with equanimity—and that in spite of disagreeing about almost everything both in principle and practice ever since, we have remained friends. That this is so must stand as exceptionally creditable to his disposition. Had the cards fallen the other way, I should almost certainly have spent as many years working under him, as it has fallen to his lot to work under me . . . .

No one ever needed a personal assistant less than Eric Maschwitz. Never happier than when he had taken on half a dozen more jobs than he could hope to get done, his disinclination to delegate work approached a disease. For weeks I seized the occasions when he left the office to abstract papers, scripts and files from his IN tray, so that I might not simply sit and twiddle my thumbs. Delightful as a companion he is not really at his best in an office. If my brother John has the theatre in his bones, Eric Maschwitz has back-stage in his blood. It was not perhaps without significance that our first collaboration in radio-production should have taken place over Compton Mackenzie's *Carnival*: the best story of a chorus-girl ever written. I have been on occasion reproached for an attitude towards life unreasonably romantic. Compared with Eric Maschwitz I am a

realist and a cynic—particularly where all things theatrical are concerned.

The first and prevailing impression of Savoy Hill was, however, one of a pleasantly happy-go-lucky amateurishness. Nowadays this is almost impossible to believe. Yet so it was. People not only remembered with some sentimental affection, but did a good deal of their work, in the spirit of, the muscular Christian who prefaced one of the earliest of programmes broadcast with the statement that "this broadcasting is going to be jolly good fun!" The—then—Chief Engineer would preside with more geniality than dignity over what were extremely akin to "penny-readings" in the studio on occasional Saturday nights. And such figures as George Grossmith and Filson Young led uneasy lives in the capacity of semi-professional advisers on the drama and literature, attending programme committee-meetings without any executive responsibility.

I have read frequent criticisms of the Corporation, giving the impression that it suffered from too much semi-military discipline, and an atmosphere akin almost to that of a Club for Senior Officers of the Services (retired). I cannot subscribe to this impression. There may have been a faint whiff of ozone hanging about the office of Admiral Carpendale, the then Director-General's second-in-command. His manner was bluff, and his speech occasionally crisp. He expected orders to be carried out. He was also enormously genial, and on occasion could be the life and soul of the—too rare—official parties which brightened our lives, dancing indeed with a most enviable and agreeable abandon. Certainly he did not pretend to any special intellectual eminence. Not long after my appointment to the Drama Department I wished to produce Ibsen's *Ghosts*. Having been brought up on the dramatic criticisms of Clement Scott, I felt that even in 1930 this might prove strong meat for the domestic loud-speaker, and thought it as well, accordingly, to submit the project in advance to the wisdom of my elders and betters. Sir John Reith\* happened to be away, and I saw the Admiral. He did not know the play. He had better read it. He had to go to Bristol on the following day...If I sent him down a copy he would read it in the train. A twinkle in his eye, as he confessed that he knew something of the play's reputation, hinted that he hoped that the reading would enliven his journey. On his return he sent for me, and handed me back the volume. His expression was gloomy, and I feared the worst. "Well," he said, frowning. "I suppose you can do it if you want to. But I can't see why you should want to—nor what they make such a fuss about! I found it very long, and very dull." I may have been fortunate beyond the ordinary, but of the so-called quarter-deck manner I met little expression. And his speeches in fluent, if rather English, French to gatherings of inter-

---

\* Now Lord Reith.

national broadcasters were a joy for ever. With foreigners the Admiral's popularity was immense, and I believe it was to him that the Corporation owed much of its prestige abroad.

It is possible that the "military discipline" legend arose partly out of the general circumstances of a time when Universal Disarmament was the pet alike of politicians and the press; when to have worn epaulettes was the sure symbol of the Big Bad Wolf. There were of course a number of retired Service officers on the staff of the Corporation. And had it not been the vogue to make every effort to forget that 1914-18 had ever happened, it would have been very much to the Corporation's discredit had the reverse been the case. Nor would its critics have been slow to draw attention to the fact.

During the Savoy Hill period, however, the one completely dominating figure was that of Sir John Reith—both literally and psychologically. I doubt if there was a single member of his staff—possibly excepting Lionel Fielden with his Etonian-cum-Regency elegance, and Hilda Matheson, who feared neither man nor devil—whose heart did not beat faster when the telephone's three rings prefaced personal inquiry or rebuke from the Director-General. His earliest period of leadership was already past: the period when, as Managing Director of the original British Broadcasting Company, he had sat, *primus inter pares*, actual overseer of his staff at work. The time of delegation of responsibility through Controllers and Divisions, which came with the move to Broadcasting House, had not yet arrived. The organisation had not, in 1929, grown beyond the capacity of direct control by a single individual. And who that individual was could not be doubted for an instant.

The result was not invariably happy. Sir John had his prejudices, and his limitations. I believe that on the whole he liked to be feared. Yet to confess fear of him was certainly to earn his contempt. I cannot say that I was ever entirely at ease with him. But I was fortunate in that my first contact with him was in the informal circumstances of amateur theatricals. And I had the impression that ever afterwards he considered that a certain amount of latitude was permissible to an individual so ineradicably tarred with the histrionic brush! It was his pleasure, when on occasion he summoned me to his presence, to assume genially that I was lacking in both morals and religious feeling; to accuse me of wishing to corrupt his ideals, or bully him, or both! This fiction, which seemed to please him without for an instant deceiving me, contributed a good deal towards a relationship which, while never intimate, was definitely agreeable. There were, of course, difficult moments. There was his determinedly calvinist belief that the Americanism "It" meant not simple physical allure, but a definite incitement to fornication! There was a rash ruling—which it is fair to add was never in practice enforced—that no play broadcast



should ever be based upon the theme of "the eternal triangle." There was an occasion when I found myself in his office pleading passionately for a performance of *Journey's End* as an appropriate commemoration of Armistice Day. I could not convince him. And as I remained persistent he passed me on to the Admiral. With the latter I waxed really eloquent, almost succeeding in reducing myself to tears in a mixture of emotion and baffled exasperation. I must have been there about quarter of an hour when Sir John looked in, and expressed surprise that I was still arguing.

"I don't understand what you want this play for," he said. "Anyone can write an appropriate programme for Armistice Day. I could write one—if I had the time. Of course you need a lot of guns and bells and things!"

And he disappeared before I could reply or comment. Again, it is only fair to add that ultimately I was allowed my own way, and was very handsomely congratulated for the success of the *Journey's End* production. I was perhaps fortunate in the fact that in Sir John's eyes the broadcasting of plays seemed rather a necessary evil, than a very serious branch of broadcasting activities. In spite of all the heroic efforts of Val Goldsmith, then Assistant-Controller, the Director-General tended to lump actors with artists and other bohemians in the general category of queer fish, liable to irresponsibility, temperamental instability, and generally casual behaviour. I doubt if he ever came fully to appreciate the need for the establishment of a high level of professional technique in work on the studio floors, as opposed to engineering control-rooms and transmitters. He once dismissed the whole business of dramatic production as "telling a few actors what to do." And his attitude to those of his staff engaged in the business of entertainment generally could be summed up as one of kindly paternalism not untinged by an inbred conviction of disapproval of the whole business. . . .

At the beginning of 1929 I was staggered by a summons to Gladstone Murray's office, where I was told that I had been appointed the Corporation's Productions Director. I found great difficulty in believing that my genial and rubicund chief was not indulging in a practical joke. The appointment not only implied promotion from being an unconsidered and largely superfluous assistant on the staff of the *Radio Times* to the direction of all B.B.C. Drama—and, in those days, of Variety into the bargain. It was the one plum of all possible jobs in broadcasting that I would have picked for myself. Yet on the face of it there was as little chance of my directing radio drama as of superseding Sir John Reith himself. I had little status in my own small sphere of activity. I had none whatever in that of Programmes. I knew none of the Dramatic department. Indeed several of its members regarded me with a mixture of suspicion and dislike for having indulged in a

certain amount of criticism of their policy and methods in the correspondence columns of the *Radio Times*. I had indeed been imported by Lance Sieveking to act in the capacity of some sort of extra studio-manager in his production of *The First Kaleidoscope*—of which more anon. But I had never produced a radio play. I was profoundly ignorant of the department's problems. And my attitude towards broadcast drama was very much that of the average supercilious listener, who at that time still believed that because one went "to see" a play, therefore a play that could only be heard must have something basically inadequate about it. I have never discovered the true story of my appointment. True, I had at the end of 1928 produced a cast of amateurs, including Sir John Reith and Admiral Carpendale, in *Tilly of Bloomsbury* at the Rudolf Steiner Hall. It seemed to go pretty well, without most of the devastating incidents so common to most amateur theatricals. And there were those who said that Sir John must have considered that if I had had the nerve to tell him what to do on a stage, I ought to be able to do likewise with actors in a studio! Others said unkindly that it must have been the distant Terry connection that had turned the trick. I prefer to believe that the real causes were a certain absence of obvious alternatives, the good-will of Roger Eckersley and B. E. Nicolls, who were most immediately affected by the change-over, and the likelihood that there was present in Sir John's mind that the experiment could do little harm. If I came to grief, I could be shifted again without any irreparable harm being done to a young man of twenty-eight. And he had, on occasion, heard me talk about the theatre and acting in extremely positive terms. I just might know something about it. . . .

I never approached a new assignment with a higher degree of apprehension. For I most passionately desired not to fail. Yet some of those with whom I was to work would have been more than human if they had not looked upon the possibility of my coming to grief with satisfaction. It could not but seem that an appointment of such a youthful "outsider" must imply a reflection upon the department in general, and upon its older hands in particular. And here I would like to take the opportunity to pay a debt of gratitude to Howard Rose. He was second-in-command to R. E. Jeffrey, who had just resigned. He might well have assumed that the succession was his by right. He was a much older man. He had watched the birth of the radio play, and helped to nurse it through its comfortless teething troubles. Yet he never displayed a particle of resentment. He gave me unwavering loyalty and help and support, and so continued. Actors vary in their opinion of Howard Rose. His production methods are not mine, and I will admit that on occasion I have sympathised with individuals who have confessed to being overwhelmed by his meticulous attention to detail, bewildered by the complexity of his script mark-

ings, and overawed by an almost glacier-like impersonality of approach. On the other hand, I have noticed that the more actors work under him, the better they like and appreciate him. One of the disadvantages of radio work is the undeniable truth that it is the producer of slightly unusual "minority-audience" programmes who is likely to get credit and attention both from critics and the broadcasting hierarchy. The "bread-and-butter" programme, which must and should form the backbone of the output, tends to be taken for granted. Yet to broadcasting the maintenance of standard, the insistence upon integrity, by the producer of the latter type is absolutely vital. Among such producers Howard Rose stands high. His contribution to radio-drama has been no small thing. To him much of the credit should go for the remarkable popularity of the "Saturday-Night Theatre" series, and for the successful handling of the serialised Trollope and Dickens novels.

I fancy that I was lucky in the moment at which I was fated to tackle my new job. The hardest of the pioneering work had already been done. Authority had been convinced, largely by the painful method of trial and error, that it was impossible to broadcast plays, even scenes from plays, from the stages of theatres. R. E. Jeffrey and Cecil Lewis had proved that a drama, which should be a genuine *drama of the air*, was a real and exciting possibility. I fear that my personal reaction to the former's original radio play *Speed* was critical rather than enthusiastic. It seemed to me to be pretentious in conception, turgid in writing. Nevertheless, at the bottom of that swirling maelstrom of words and sounds there glimmered the jewels of "What Might Come to be Done." For all its faults *Speed* was a milestone. Another was when Cecil Lewis made the adaptation for broadcasting of Conrad's novel *Lord Jim*. A third was Lance Sieveking's *First Kaleidoscope*.

Sieveking has written elsewhere in picturesque detail of that production. I will not pretend to compete with his detailed recollections of the occasion. But it certainly made radio history after its kind. Its author-producer has not been altogether fortunate. He was perhaps over much influenced during his most impressionable years by G. K. Chesterton, and by the theory of that master of paradox that because some things were better looked at inside out or upside down such a viewpoint should invariably be adopted. Talented and imaginative beyond the ordinary, his eyes gazing towards distant horizons, he was liable to neglect what lay immediately before his feet. Actors would gaze with a certain dumb bewilderment at his tall and handsome presence, while he exhorted them to play "in a deep-green mood," or spoke with fluent enthusiasm of "playing the dramatic-control panel, as one plays an organ." As an experimenter he was admirable. Unfortunately the circumstances of broadcasting provided him with no

laboratory in which experiments could be carried out. All had to be done *coram populo*, in the course of normal programme activities. The result was that others profited by the application of his successes to the treatment of their work. He alone was left to shoulder the responsibilities of his failures. And gradually there grew up the impression that he was unpractical, peculiar, and "difficult." None the less, his influence was considerable, not only upon the details of production technique, which appeared in such elaborate productions as *Carnival*, but in gaining the sympathies of Sir John Reith and Val Goldsmith for an approach to broadcasting work as a whole that should not be entirely philistine or routine-ridden. I believe that it was almost entirely due to Sieveking, and out of consideration for his abilities, that Sir John agreed to the formation of the first Programme Research Section. Of this section there were four original members, who roused, I fear, no little envy in the breasts of their less fortunately situated colleagues by having neither fixed office hours of work, nor concrete programme assignments. Their business was to be free to use their imaginations, to preserve the sensitivity proper to the creative and artistic mind, and ultimately to contribute results in broadcasting form. The intention, indeed, was to achieve the "laboratory" of which I have spoken. But the machine was inexorable. To produce results implied the use of studios, of actors, of engineering gear. It implied competition with the regular producing departments. It was hardly surprising that the experimental free-lancers failed to stay the course. Without the aid of the normal machinery automatically at the disposal of the "bread-and-butter programme boys," ideas could burgeon—but they tended to blush unheard. Sir John Reith, judging sternly and reasonably on results, began to wonder whether his concession to unconventionality was really justified. The situation became acute when R. E. Jeffrey—who, on resigning from Productions had become head of Programme Research—finally left the Corporation to become "The Golden Voice of the Silver Screen," as a film news commentator. A day came when I was summoned to the Director-General's office, and asked whether I would recommend the scrapping of Programme Research, or alternatively, would take the individuals concerned under the Productions wing. Admittedly with a good deal of misgiving I plumped for the latter: with misgivings because, as something of an individualist myself, I fancied that a team of talented persons given the exploitation of individuality as an assignment, would be impossible to drive and difficult even to lead. The people concerned were also inclined to alarm and despondency—the more so as they were not made aware that the very continuance of their professional existence had been at stake. The months immediately ensuing were not free from strain. But in the course of time a reasonable *modus vivendi* was achieved, and the foundations of what was to

become the Features Department of the Corporation were laid. It is true that the Experimental Laboratory was lost. It is also true that some of the most distinguished present-day programme work—the productions of Stephen Potter, Geoffrey Bridson and Francis Dillon; the plays of Louis MacNeice and Edward Sackville-West—owes its existence, and its recognised claim to time-space, to the time when E. A. Harding, in *Imperial Communications*, first proved that there was fascinating broadcasting material in statistics and distances; when E. J. King-Bull wedded speech most subtly to music in his radio-piece, *Reconnaissance*; when *Russian Twilight*, designed by Mary Hope Allen, pointed the way to all the *Mosaic* programmes of mingled poetry and music.

The "feature-programme" indeed has become almost a contradiction in terms. Originally invented to cover programmes without obvious labels—programmes that for some quality of the unusual stood out from the generally flattish plain of normal programme output—the "feature" slowly made itself indispensable; became in itself a part of broadcasting routine; settled down, under the vital and energetic, if occasionally "slap-happy," direction of Laurence Gilliam, as the livelier if not better half of the Dramatic Department.\* I do not think it is unfair to claim for the work of "Features" that it is the most essentially "radio" of all programmes broadcast. If broadcasting ceased upon the morrow's midnight with no pain, music and the theatre would and could go on. But only in the restricted conditions of the documentary feature-film is there any true parallel to the broadcast "feature"—and even here the analogy is more apparent than real.

The term "feature" is not altogether a happy one. From time to time attempts have been made to dispense with its use, as being largely meaningless outside the walls of Broadcasting House. It has been employed only too frequently by journalists to cover certain programme activities far beyond either the scope of the ambitions or the Feature Department. It has persisted, I fear, only through lack of obvious alternatives, for it is not by any means simple to reply to the question, what exactly is a Feature Programme? Definition, heaven knows, is a dangerous and thankless business, but it may not be too far wide of the truth to reply: a Feature Programme is any programme item—other than a radio play—whose author makes use of the specialised technique of radio-dramatic production. Its range therefore is exceedingly wide. At one end of the scale—and of course in collaboration with Engineers and Outside Broadcasting staff—a Features producer will handle such a programme as that on Christmas Day, preceding a speech by His Majesty, and literally "putting a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." At the other he will be

---

\* And indeed has recently achieved complete departmental independence.

assigned an anthology of unpublished modern poetry and music. To be ideally suited to his job, he should be, not only a producer of competence and force, but a writer of parts, with a journalist's instinct for the topical, a scholar's background and an artist's taste. His work has the advantage of being immensely diversified; freed as far as is humanly possible from routine activities; with almost complete elasticity of working hours; opportunity for contact with all sorts and conditions of humanity in every sort of surroundings. It has the corresponding handicaps of making concentrated and hair-raising demands during any one of a day's twenty-four hours; of never being completed; of desire almost invariably and inevitably outrunning performance. . . .

But it is a long way from *The End of Savoy Hill* to the days when Features really began to come into their own. Indeed, their proper recognition was hardly achieved before the outbreak of the Second German War.

I will admit that I never pass the eastern end of the Strand without a side-glance down the steep slope towards the Embankment, and a faint sensation of melancholy and nostalgia. I remember so vividly my first office, with its rather morbid outlook upon the graveyard of the Savoy Chapel, in whose trees the starlings shrilled so vigorously before leaving for overseas: an office so like a corridor that it was almost impossible to heat; an office in which I met for the first time in my life a film star—Miss Gloria Swanson—and a Giant of Variety—Sir Harry Lauder, and was disillusioned by both. Savoy Hill may have been casual, amateurish, uncertain of its status in the professional entertainment world, coy in its approach to the British Home. But Savoy Hill was alive. Machine had not yet mastered man. Nor would it do so, as long as Sir John Reith was the man. The key of Savoy Hill hung on the wall of the Director-General's considerably more impressive office in Broadcasting House. Do I wrong him in believing that he also cherished an occasional bitter-sweet memory of the earliest days of broadcasting, the days which he worked so hard, and did so much, to fill according to convictions which may not always have been popular or distinguished, but which also were never unsure, and certainly were never motivated unworthily?

## CHAPTER VIII

### ROUND AND ABOUT THE BROADCAST PLAY

THE story of the broadcast play is largely the story of a contradiction in terms. Unfortunately, all of us, as children, have looked forward to being taken "to see" a play. We have not been in the habit of

looking forward "to hear" a play. From its very beginning, therefore, the broadcast play has been up against an initial handicap, an initial prejudice. It has inevitably been considered a substitute, a *pis aller*; as something not quite existing in its own right. The reason is simple. When broadcasting began, the microphone was thought of primarily as an eavesdropping instrument. Few people dreamed that it could ever be a precise medium of artistic expression. In many ways it has to this day remained an eavesdropping instrument—and none the worse for that. The magical thrill remains for the listener when he hears the actual roar of the Derby crowd on Epsom Downs, and the thunder of the hooves rounding Tattenham corner; when he hears the rising and falling excitement of the "fans" at Twickenham; the whine of actual shell, or the rumble of tank, however imperfectly these sounds may be reproduced under the stress of difficult or dangerous circumstances. But it was not long before people came to realise that eavesdropping by itself was not enough; or at least that far more could be done with microphones than that. It is, I think, true to claim for radio drama that its principal service to broadcasting has not been in the actual plays it has produced, but in proving conclusively that the application of a specialised professional technique was not only necessary for a single activity of broadcasting, but was desirable for the broadcasting of programmes as a whole—actuality-outside-broadcasts always excepted.

Radio drama can make this claim not because of any outstanding vision or capacity on the part of members of the B.B.C. staff concerned with it, but owing to circumstances inherent in its production and very being. As far as the broadcasting of music and particularly concerts is concerned, the eavesdropping principle could, with obvious modifications, very reasonably be applied. People were in the habit of going to concerts to listen; and not everyone, by any means, shares my view that part of the fascination of a visit to a concert hall lies in the excitement of watching a big orchestra in furious action and the "performance" of a talented conductor. For the would-be listener to music, microphones properly spaced about the hall could convey largely what he expected and wished to hear without irreparable loss. With the play it is quite another story. Go to any theatre you like, sit back as comfortably as you like and close your eyes. You will be amazed to find how difficult if not impossible it becomes to follow the action; to disentangle a large number of characters from each other; more particularly the female characters; how awkward and halting the progress of the piece seems when all those subtle little pieces of "business," so dear to the modern playwright and actor, are unseen and, in consequence without significance. Go further still. Take away all the agreeable infection of mass audience reaction; imagine yourself deprived of the allure of colour, of lighting effects, of feminine attrac-

tion. What remains? Extraordinarily little, and that little largely unintelligible.

In the early stages of broadcasting, various attempts were made to conceal microphones cunningly about the stages of West End theatres. The results were hopeless. Managements did not like to admit it. Managements to this day do not like to admit it. They are thinking in terms of advertisement value, not in terms of listener entertainment.

For some time the B.B.C. ran a series *From the London Theatres* designed as in some sort, a shop window for the West End stage.\* It only partially achieved its object because so many managements refused intelligent co-operation. As a rule they would only co-operate if their plays were a failure or on the edge of failure and they looked to the broadcast advertisement with pathetically forlorn hope. The series consisted of selected scenes from a current play put together and broadcast from a studio. Again and again a management would ask why such scenes could not be taken from the stage of their theatre. In that case, they asserted, it would be quite another pair of shoes; shoes they would be far more interested to try on. Quite apart from the obvious and inevitable timing difficulties involved, they resolutely declined to believe that the studio broadcast would gain by being infinitely more intelligible and, in consequence, of far more entertainment value to the listener. Even when they agreed to a studio broadcast, most of them showed extraordinarily little interest or ingenuity in arranging the scripted scenes for broadcast presentation. As a rule, such scripts were merely pages from the prompt copy of their play linked by the flattest and dullest of explanatory narratives. It was, I think, Mr. Emlyn Williams who first proved by the taking of a little trouble and the exercise of a little ingenuity, that a perfectly good miniature radio dramatic piece could be constructed from such fragments of a stage play; that advertisement value did not necessarily have to be divorced from entertainment value.

It is not reasonable to blame managements unduly. They were faced by a strange animal with unknown habits and unknown capacities, hypothetically alarming. Worse still, they were faced by a new competitor, dabbling in their pet preserves of plays and players, and unaffected by their own Old Man of the Sea, the weekly-box-office return. It would have been asking too much of human nature to expect the commercial theatrical manager to welcome the broadcast play with open arms or to encourage its progress or popularity.

It was probably unreasonable, also, to expect much in the shape of interest or co-operation from actors in those early days. They were not exactly encouraged to take the new medium seriously. Fees were small. Production methods were largely those of trial and error. Instead of having to speak lines in the exhilarating environment of a

\* And has recently revived it, under auspices definitely more favourable



crowded theatre, in the glory of makeup and the halo of a spotlight, the actor found himself reading from a script into an uninspiring square box, and wearing his ordinary clothes. The moment he began to act, as he understood the term, he was warned that he might deafen thousands of people. I do not think it is exaggerating to say that in the earliest days of broadcasting actors regarded radio engagements almost as a means of earning cigarette money at the equivalent of a penny-reading. It was beyond imagination in those days to conceive of a genuine art of radio acting, of the sort of mastery of microphone technique to which we have become accustomed in the work of, say, Mr. James McKechnie and Miss Gladys Young.

At a slightly later stage, there emerged the handicaps inherent in the machinery of production. The limelight of much publicity fell upon sound-effects on the one hand, and the dramatic-control panel-cum-multiple-studio-technique on the other. The end was forgotten in a riot of excitement concerning the means. Sound-effects were fun and sound-effects were news. It was entertaining to watch the potatoes being rolled on a drum to simulate an avalanche ; the matchbox being crumpled to represent the splintered iceberg ; the combined operation of tin bath and roller skate to bring the train into or out of the country station.

Distinguished visitors were solemnly conducted to admire these things. There was a legend, I am convinced without foundation, that the first Director-General of the B.B.C. had been found spending some of his very occasional moments of leisure in trying his hand with roller skate and tin bath. . . .

Simultaneously, producers who would have been more profitably employed in learning how to interpret plays and how to handle actors, were seduced by the overwhelming attractions of the mechanical gadgets provided for their eager fingers by ingenious engineers. Control knobs spun ; cue lights flickered ; and a whole jargon of semi-technical terms came into being. Productions' merits were judged relatively to the number of studios which they employed. Plays were written, not because their authors had anything particular to say or were outstandingly capable of saying it, but because they gave opportunities for new and remarkable exercises in virtuosity of dramatic control panel work.

The phase may have been regrettable. It was also necessary. There was nothing wrong about it, except that it ought to have taken place in a laboratory and not before the public. Unfortunately, broadcasting is remorseless. Its output is so large, its pace of living is so great that laboratory programme work—always accepted as desirable in theory—is never achieved in practice. It remains to be seen whether the public for, and sponsors of, television will be prepared to possess their souls in a little patience in order to achieve a more satisfactory standard of programme production.

All these factors apart, however, nothing has so handicapped the progress of the broadcast plays as such, as the consistently and impenitently conservative attitude of the listening public. There is, of course, a small enthusiastic and intelligent minority, who believe that the radio play is interesting as an art form, is exciting as a listening experience, and can be important as a contribution to civilised entertainment. There is, undoubtedly, a public with a sound critical appreciation of such plays as *The Rescue* (Edward Sackville-West) or *Columbus* (Louis MacNiece); for the dramatic dialogues of Eric Linklater and the radio pageant plays of Clemence Dane. But it is probably true that the only plays specially written for broadcasting which have rivalled adapted stage plays in listening popularity were those written by Miss Dorothy Sayers on the theme of the life of Our Lord; and Miss Sayers herself has acknowledged her debt for unparalleled publicity to the singular behaviour in connection with their production of The Lord's Day Observance Society. . . .

It is, of course, true that the Englishman in his home tends to be a creature of habit, and that listening to the radio has become one of his home habits. He likes to listen at regular times. For the most part he likes to know what he is going to hear. He doesn't wish to be shocked—in particular he doesn't wish his family to be shocked. The name of an established playwright under the name of a play with which he is faintly familiar, stands in the columns of the *Radio Times* as in some sort a guarantee against the possibility of anything startling or disagreeable. An almost audible sigh of relief seems to have gone up from listeners all over the country when a time for a play to be broadcast each week was established on Saturday night, and when it was realised that the plays to be heard on that night were for the most part, to be such as had been sanctified at some time or another by a successful run in a London theatre. The result in terms of listening-research figures was astonishingly large, and I doubt if it has done much active harm to the English public. But it was not very encouraging for the future of the original radio play.

That future depends—as indeed the future of the ordinary theatre play depends—in the final instance, upon the writer. And if audiences have been conservative, managements nervous and embarrassed, radio producers unreasonably susceptible to the wiles of their own mechanised technique, the writers themselves are by no means without their share of responsibility for a state of affairs admittedly unsatisfactory. Certain legends persist about conditions inevitable in writing for broadcasting, which it has proved almost impossible to break down. And I believe it is to the persistence of these legends that a great deal of the trouble is due.

I cannot remember who it was who first stated explicitly that "no one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money." I have a pretty shrewd

belief that it was Doctor Johnson. The first generally accepted legend about the writing of plays for broadcasting is that, from a financial point of view, it simply is not worth while. This belief can, I think, be very considerably qualified. It is true that it not worth while for the established playwright, or for the author of novels that regularly best-sell, to use for broadcasting a theme suitable for a three-act play or best-selling novel. Nor it is fair for broadcasting officials to throw out the honeyed bait of the value of radio publicity to make up for the disparity of fees. No one nowadays is going to doubt the value of publicity, least of all, of radio publicity. But that value can be over-rated, and publicity, like fine words, butters no parsnips. It is also probably true that radio publicity, unless it continues over a considerable period, tends to waste its sweetness on the desert air. Where the author generally makes his mistake is in getting into his head either that an idea used for the medium of broadcasting is necessarily an idea wasted, or that the amount of effort called for by the writing of a broadcast play is the same as that demanded by the writing of a stage play or film.

In this connection it may not be irrelevant to quote the fact that not so long ago, when I made this point in a letter to a daily newspaper, its radio correspondent gave me the lie as directly as it was possible to in print, without being actively offensive. In support of his rebuttal he quoted, as a typical piece of radio drama, the radio adaptation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*! "This," said he, "obviously implied quite as much work as the writing of a three-act play." It seemed to me unnecessary to pursue the argument further.

The truth, of course, is that the writing of an original piece of broadcasting approximates far more nearly in expenditure of time and effort to the writing of a "long-short" story. It has been fairly conclusively proved by experience that the best length for the original radio play is between forty minutes and one hour. Anything less than forty minutes is liable to degenerate into the expanded sketch or undeveloped incident. Anything lasting much over an hour, unless considerably embellished with the type of music which automatically makes listening easier, is liable to prove too much of a strain upon the attention of the audience. Speaking in entirely practical terms, this equals in number of words, not very much more than the first act of the ordinary stage play; and it is notorious that the first act of stage plays are quite simple things to write! So simple, indeed, that one intelligent theatrical manager once advised me that the third act of a play should always be written first.

It is curious how that unfortunate misuse of the word "play" has seemed to put authors into mental irons. Regardless of the fact that the conventions of the theatre—conventions established by physical limitations and restrictions—do not apply to the medium of

the microphone, they persist either in dusting off plays written for and rejected by theatrical managements; or in writing plays for broadcasting, complete with such unnecessary handicaps as divisions into acts and masses of purely visual stage directions. Nothing can be more important to the would-be radio dramatist than the realisation that he is working for a medium which is untrammelled by the classical unities, a medium which can move through time and space without let or hindrance. Nor is it primarily a matter of hitting upon some ingenious trick of setting. It is true that *Danger*, the first of all original radio plays, written by Mr. Richard Hughes, was placed at the bottom of a coal mine and was proportionately effective. The setting of a radio play in a fog, or the blackout at its worst, would always be effective and enjoy the advantage of audience and actors being assumed to be equally in the dark! It is, however, dangerous to argue from this particular to the general. And, granted that an author has the gift of dialogue—I believe it to be a gift and not an acquisition—has something to say, and can tell a story, his reaction in working for the microphone should primarily be one of relief in release from the conventions of acts, intervals, and realistic scenery. But here, too, the author must be on his guard. This release can only too easily be abused, and among plays submitted for broadcast production, there is a consistently high proportion of second-hand treatment of themes akin to those of the pseudo-scientific novels of Mr. H. G. Wells, and of fantasies which can, as a rule, be more truthfully, if crudely, labelled “whimsies.”

So much for the darker side of the picture. I think, however, that the decisive evidence on behalf of the broadcasting of plays as handled and developed by the B.B.C. is the general acknowledgement in other countries of its pre-eminence and success. Before the advent to power of the Nazis in Germany, German broadcasting made some of its greatest efforts in the radio-dramatic field and for a time, held the lead. It may not be altogether without significance that this precisely coincided with the great period of German silent films. English listeners who heard broadcast productions of *Brigade Exchange* and *Flags On the Matterhorn* were not slow to point out at the time that German authors were grasping the possibility of the new medium more surely and more imaginatively than our own. But this Teutonic lead was not maintained. Wherever I have travelled abroad, and talked with representatives of foreign broadcasting organisations, I have been both gratified and embarrassed by the compliments paid to British radio drama and the apparent envy with which they have regarded its comparatively untrammelled development. I am not anxious to involve myself in the thorny byways of controversy over the respective merits of commercially-sponsored and monopoly broadcasting. But there is little doubt that as far as the broadcasting of plays is concerned, the terms of the B.B.C.'s charter

have been inestimably beneficial. Comparison in this case must inevitably be made with the situation in the United States. Here, as far as I can judge, the broadcast play (the activities of the Columbia Workshop always excepted) has hardly emerged from its swaddling bands. Rehearsals concentrated on split-second timing, almost complete subservience to the advertising value of star names, the low payment of actors in "sustaining" programmes as compared with the swollen fees paid by advertising sponsors, have all combined to maintain the broadcasting of plays in the United States on a level comparatively elementary. To this generalisation, as I have said, the output of the Columbia Workshop has been an outstanding and most honourable exception. But here, perhaps, the emphasis has been thrown too forcibly the other way. The value of experiment has been over-emphasized at the expense of value of content. While the technical brilliance of such producers as Irving Reiss and Norman Corwin is beyond dispute, it is not unfair, I think, to find lacking in their work both depth of feeling and any serious contribution of artistic permanence. The machinery is manipulated with unerring skill; words and sounds are woven into a pattern multi-coloured and fascinating. Yet ultimate satisfaction is lacking; nor is it unreasonable that this should be so, considering that the very basis of the Workshop's activities is an experimental technical one.

It may, I think, be reasonably argued that the case for the broadcast play as a new art-form, must be left as so far unproven. I fear that it is doubtful whether there is time left in which it can be satisfactorily proved before television arrives to deliver the *coup de grâce*. At this point the analogy inevitably drawn from the history of the cinema is mercilessly clear. Not all the genuine artistry of the silent film could save it from tragical, sudden extinction once Mr. Jolson had sent the strains of "Sonny Boy" ringing round the world. The early pictures with sound were crude in execution, almost entirely commercial in conception, aesthetically negligible; but once the audience had experienced the addition of a new dimension in the cinema it would no longer be satisfied with the silent film, however admirable. The same process will, in my view, inevitably take place as soon as television takes a step forward from the embryonic and experimental stage in which it still was at the beginning of the Second German War. It is to be hoped that those responsible for its development will take warning from what happened in the world of films, and that the televised drama of the air will not immediately revert to the mere photographing of stage plays as opposed to the exploitation of what is largely a new and untested medium. If this warning is not heeded there will be a melancholy intervening period when the disadvantages of theatre, cinema and broadcasting will all be combined. Producers of television drama will be well advised to remember the old adage and

avoid breaking into a gallop before they have learned to stand erect on two feet. . . .

On the other hand, whatever the view may be concerning the writing of plays for the microphone, there can no longer be any argument about the acting of such plays. . It is true that the question most frequently put to the B.B.C. producer by the average listener is "Do your actors really act, or do they just read their parts?" It is also true that the listener is usually a little bewildered when informed that the answer to both questions is "yes." Actors have proved infinitely more practical and adaptable in this matter than have authors. This, of course, may be because actors are used to working under direction while authors are not; and that it is easier to direct the playing of a part than it is to explain the writing of a play. The process, of course, took time. I can well remember the days of Savoy Hill when actors, and especially not very good actors, insisted on the use of stage technique; when it was necessary to detail members of the effects staff to stand like guardian angels on each side of leading players and pluck almost continually at their sleeves to prevent them either from blowing the microphone into the middle of next week, or from forgetting all about it and striding up and down the studio as if they were pacing the boards of Drury Lane! It seems a far cry from then to the present time when it is possible to cast a play such as Ibsen's *Ghosts* with players who have made their reputations almost entirely on the air, and to get from them a performance which could reasonably challenge any purely stage cast that could be assembled.

Is there really so very much difference in method and in conception? I think there is. There is, first of all, the uncanny quality of the microphone of revealing even the faintest suspicion of mannerism or insincerity. Mr. L. A. G. Strong has told the story of bringing a girl to a microphone for an audition. Those listening drew attention to a lisp. The young lady had not lisped for years, and this revival of a forgotten childhood failing was caused purely by temporary nervousness in front of a microphone. And I believe it was Mr. Shaw who once said, in an interview on the screen, that it ought to be possible to tell from the voice of any broadcaster exactly what he had had for dinner! I am not implying any lack of sincerity in stage actors, but I think that most stage actors would agree with me, that there is very little which their technical accomplishment cannot make acceptable or credible in a theatre. Here the microphone is a harsher taskmaster.

Secondly, and equally important, is the fact that acting on the stage must inevitably imply creating an effect that is a little larger than life. The actor projects the character he is playing outwards, as it were, to the ends of the stalls and circle, to the back wall of the gallery. His attack and his timing are largely dependent upon that queer thing, the "feel" of an audience and the mass reaction of that audience. In a

broadcasting studio, while he is playing to an infinitely greater audience in sum, he is not playing to an audience in mass, and he gets no audience reaction whatever. He is playing to individuals, or to small groups, surrounded by the comforts—or distractions—of domesticity—and who have paid an infinitesimal sum for their seats! He has no need to "throw" his voice, to exaggerate his gesture. But he has to convince and hold the attention of the individual listener with infinitely small gradations of voice, and with very little to help him apart from such trimmings as incidental music and sound-effects—concerning which the golden rule should always be "when in doubt, cut." The radio actor, therefore, must be intelligent, for he must know what he is talking about; he must be sincere and sensitive, or he will carry no conviction and produce no feeling in his listeners; he must be confident without being conceited, or the conditions of studio work and the lack of reaction from an audience of flesh and blood on the spot, will render his performance bloodless, mechanical, or worst of all, "read."

Gazing at him through the glass panel of the listening room, the interested observer may think, at first sight, that the experienced radio actor is far more "tied to his script" than his colleague from the theatre. The latter, having found the studio atmosphere strange and oppressive, has probably taken off his coat. He is inclined to a good deal of movement, both of head and arms; he seems, on the face of it, to be working far the harder of the two. Yet heard through the loud-speaker it is the stage actor whose naturalism vanishes with this very effort. It is the quietly unobtrusive technique of the experienced broadcaster which steals the microphone every time. And the radio actor does this, not by deliberately underplaying the stage actor, nor by clutching feverishly to the support of his script, but by realising that in playing to the microphone he is playing to an audience nearer than the front row of any stalls, and upon a vocal instrument which, in the theatre, would, perforce, be entirely inaudible.

An interesting correspondence developed not so long ago in the columns of *The Listener* as to the respective difficulties of the radio producer, on the one hand, and the stage producer on the other. For the most part the arguments used on either side seemed to me curiously irrelevant to the true issue. In my opinion there can be no comparison in difficulty—the problems concerned are simply different. All production, of course, is fundamentally the application of common sense to the solution of a number of practical problems, combined with the knack of direction, and the intelligence required for interpretation. There is, however, one aspect of radio production which is not always apparent either to listener or to critic. In the theatre, once his rehearsals are over, the producer has done his best—and worst. Once the curtain has rung up on the first night of the performance, he can do no more than watch, pray, or betake himself as the spirit moves him,

either to the nearest bar or to the farthest corner of the Embankment. Not so with the producer of a radio play. He may have an admirable script. He may be blessed with a perfect cast. But it is upon his personal control, both of his nervous system and of his own ten fingers, that the machinery of production depends *during actual transmission*. The fumbling of light cues, the jerking of volume control knobs—and how small an attack of first-night “nerves” suffices to produce either—will serve to ruin the work both of author and players. The radio producer’s responsibility in the shape of active participation lasts until the final curtain. And not the least of his problems is to remember to find the time to rehearse himself after he has brought his actors to concert pitch. A good deal of humour has been worked off at various times upon Lance Sieveking for his persistent theory that there is something akin to the playing of a musical instrument in the process of controlling a broadcast play. I cannot go the whole way with him by any means—the wholehearted adoption of such a theory leads to over-emphasis on the machinery at the inevitable expense of the material—but there is a substantial basis of truth in the contention, in so far that it is utterly impossible for a radio producer to achieve the first flight of his profession if he does not possess a musical ear, a razor-edged sense of timing, and an innate aptitude or acquired capacity for the smooth handling of mechanical controls. The proper balance of background atmosphere, the smooth flow from scene to scene, the choice of the perfect moment at which to “crossfade,” particularly when dealing with music, a perfect grasp of the value and effect of contrasting *tempi*, not only need to be part of a radio producer’s intellectual equipment. He must also be capable of putting them into practice by means of his own hands.

It is true that there are plenty of plays produced over the air whose control is left to programme-engineers working under the producer’s supervision. It is also true that in cases where the mechanics are extremely simple, little or no harm need come from this practice. But in my own view, such production can never be absolutely first-class. There must always be that faint time lag inseparable from the process of the producer communicating his intentions to another pair of hands; and however right the intention, however dexterous the hands, the lag remains. Nor, under such conditions, can there ever be that genuine flash of inspiration which can enable a producer at his own controls to bring off a “long shot” in the actual course of transmission.

It was, I believe, in 1931 that I produced a translation of a German play called *Flags on the Matterhorn*,\* which dealt with Edward Whymper’s famous and tragic climb and conquest of the last giant of the Alps. The climax of the play was, of course, the celebrated incident when the rope broke and four members of the climbing party

\* I hope it may be revived before long.



were hurled thousands of feet to their deaths. The effect was a tricky one to achieve at any time, and at rehearsal it never got beyond what might be termed the "adequate" stage. Without going into unnecessary technical details, it is probably enough to say that I was using a "speech" studio for the cast, with a special "echo" studio attached to it for the purpose of throwing the voices out, as it were, on to the air at the moment of the disaster. As this happened, both studios were faded out and the effect of falling was reasonably well established. I was not, however, satisfied that it lasted long enough or thinned out the sound in the way which the situation actually demanded. During the actual transmission, however, just as I came to the point in the scene, I had an idea. Having faded both studios almost to vanishing point, I took the "speech" studio out completely, pulled the "echo" studio—which now contained the voices, but most curiously disembodied—back to about half strength, and then, very slowly, faded the "echo" studio in its turn. The result was quite remarkably impressive. It would have been quite impossible for me to achieve it if I had had, at that moment, to explain to another individual just what I wanted done, and just at what strength the controls needed holding. It is an extreme example, and of course an unusual one, but I am convinced that the argument is generally sound.

At this point it may be relevant to consider shortly the whole technique of dramatic-control-panel-and-multiple-studio production. The B.B.C. was not only the pioneer in this field, it was left firmly alone in it. I saw an attempt at imitation by "lash-up" methods in Breslau in 1932, and I believe that the American Companies have, on occasion, experimented in the technique, only to abandon it. One of the minor results of the Second German War was temporarily to kill it in this country owing to accommodation difficulties, and since September, 1939, nearly all radio dramatic production by the B.B.C. has been carried out in single studios. None-the-less, I remain an impenitent advocate of the more complex system. Its origin was very simple. Before the assembling of the first dramatic control panel, it was discovered that the main difficulty facing the radio dramatic producer was that of relative balance. Various ingredients of the radio play—its actors, its sound-effects and its music—were continually blurring each other or getting in each other's way. It was obvious as a corollary that if the producer could achieve a separate control to mix the separate ingredients, proper balance could be more easily maintained, and blurring and confusion avoided. The panel, by bringing to a single control point the output of a number of separate studios, could enable the producer to have such control. He could place his music in one studio, and his sound-effects in a second; his actors in a third, or indeed, if desirable, in a fourth and fifth, with different acoustical qualities. It became then a comparatively simple matter for him to balance his

actors against music, or sound, and further, to fade smoothly and simply from scene to scene and achieve a controlled and studied production *tempo* quite impossible when he had no more than a single studio at his disposal. Contact with the various studios was maintained by means of cue lights operated from the panel, during transmission, and by microphone and loudspeaker during rehearsal. Another great advantage of this method—in my view an overwhelming one—was the fact that the producer, in the later stages of his rehearsal, worked from the point of ear of the listening audience and not from a control point prejudiced by physical sight. The play came to him at the panel through a loudspeaker as it came to the listener in the home. However experienced the producer may be, it is almost impossible for him, when he can watch his actors at work, for him to disassociate what he sees from vocal performance. He is bound to be influenced by personality, by keenness or the reverse, even by good looks. In the splendid isolation of the dramatic-control rooms which, in Broadcasting House were a floor or more distant from the dramatic studios, he could achieve a quasi-Olympian detachment and a properly dispassionate view of play and players.

Against this it has been, and no doubt always will be, argued that this isolation robs him of that close personal contact with the cast which can make so much difference to actors, and on which many producers are radically dependent. It is alleged that the critical or correcting voice, emerging faintly distorted, glacial and impersonal from a loudspeaker, must inevitably sound both discouraging and superior. It is maintained that it is bad enough for actors to have to play without an audience, but it is cruel to expect them to play without even a sight of the producer. This argument is pleaded with a passion proportionate to the essentially theatrical leanings both of the producer and the actor.

During my visit to Breslau I saw a red-haired Austrian producer, only recently imported into broadcasting from the Viennese theatre, abandoning the control knobs of his panel in a frenzy and dashing to the glass window from which a view of his main studio could be obtained, standing thereat frenziedly gesticulating and vocally impotent. And while he did his best to indicate to his cast what he wanted by means of dumb show, he appeared entirely to forget the play as a whole.

In the United States it seems to be taken for granted that the radio play producer should act almost in the capacity of an orchestral conductor. In American studios the cue light is unknown, and orchestra, actors and sound effects must work directly to the producer's hand gestures. This certainly leads to greater direct personal control, but I find it hard to believe that it is possible simultaneously to give so much personal attention visually to what is going on in the

studio, and simultaneously to keep a proper aural grip upon the play as it comes out of the loudspeaker in the listening room. There is, of course, the further point that before the war in Great Britain when rehearsals did not have to be cut down to a minimum, the producer could establish his personal control "on the floor" during a number of rehearsals before he ever went to the panel at all. And to think of using the multiple-studio technique without such preliminary floor work would be quite indefensible. Given, however, enough rehearsal time, the dramatic-control panel gives the producer one overmastering advantage. It enables him properly to rehearse himself. And I must repeat that in radio drama the producer is very much a performer for all that his voice is never heard.

Let me take one more admittedly extreme example. One of the best and most successful broadcast plays ever written was Patrick Hamilton's *To The Public Danger*, which told, in a steadily increasing *tempo* of suspense and action, the story of three people drinking in a roadhouse, going off in a car, and driving more and more wildly until what had begun as a drunken frolic ended in disaster and tragedy. The play ran for roughly an hour, and during that time there was hardly a moment when at least three studios were not in continuous operation. I remember well not only the acute mental concentration called for by the play, but the actual physical strain upon wrists and fingers, which left me at the end aching and shaking almost as if I had been at the controls of some highly powered machine. I was most fortunate in my cast—Miss Hermione Baddeley and Mr. Deverell were, perhaps, outstanding—but what had principally needed rehearsal in that special case was the actual operation of the panel; the balance of the voices against a most complicated sequence of sound-effects; and the achievement of a *tempo* that should mount by proper gradations to a climax. To have gone straight "from the floor" to the handling of the panel would have been asking for trouble and courting disaster. It needed at least three rehearsals after both actors and sound-effects had been "set" to give the producer the practice needed to bring the whole production to concert pitch.

*To The Public Danger* was, of course, an outstandingly elaborate production from the point of view of panel work, but even the normal handling of a simple mixing unit, with its two or three knobs, calls for greater *expertise* than might on the surface appear. Wartime production for the most part has depended upon such mixing units which, being "non-compensating," have not the precision of the dramatic control panel, and for the most part are used to mix the output of a couple of separate microphones in the studio, a gramophone unit operated—most uncomfortably—from the listening room itself, and, if the producer is lucky, one small separate studio for narrative only. Some of the best plays written for broadcasting—*Flags on the*

*Matterhorn*, for instance—are simply impossible to produce with such sternly limited facilities. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that most large-scale productions under these working conditions become a producer's nightmare, and I have found it difficult to persuade people that the "*The Man Born to be King*" series, with its casts of forty or so, and its big crowd scenes, was so handled, and with never more than two days' rehearsal in all. I hasten to add that this was the case not because the Corporation willed it so, but because harsh circumstances insisted.

It will, in my view, be both a tragic and reactionary step if such successful results as have been achieved in the dramatic field during the war are quoted to make a case against a reversion in the future to the dramatic-control panel and the use of multiple studios. Infinite hand-to-mouth ingenuity on the part of producers and engineers, untiring labour by actors—and particularly by the members of the B.B.C. Repertory Company—have had to be exploited to make up for rehearsal time murderously telescoped, for gear and facilities hideously inadequate.

Accommodation was difficult between dispersal and *blitz*, studios were limited, output was increased, gear could not be replaced. In short, there was a war on! The best possible had to be done with whatever was available. But it must be emphasised that it was not, and could not be, *the best*. The radio play will never, in my view, have the chance it deserves to come to its full flowering, unless it is given the advantages which it enjoyed before the end of 1939—the advantages of long rehearsals, the dramatic-control panel, and the simultaneous use of at least four or five studios at a time.

## CHAPTER IX

### "BROADCASTING HOUSE"

It was not perhaps insignificant that the first discovery made, as soon as the Corporation removed from Savoy Hill to Portland Place, was that its new headquarters were already too small. The imagination of those responsible for broadcasting has never been able to keep pace with its growth. And I believe this has been due less to the limitations of the former than to the phenomenal quality of the latter. The usual and to-be-expected brickbats were duly flung at the new building. It was "a queer shape"; it was "pretentious"; it was "pompous"; it had "neglected the claims of contemporary architecture and decoration"; its resemblance to the stern half of a ship could only be attributed to the overwhelmingly sentimental influence of Admiral Carpendale . . .

No doubt there was substance in certain of the criticisms. But personally I must confess that in sum I found Broadcasting House preferable to the old home by the Embankment. It had, at least, been *built for broadcasting*. It typified, in steel and concrete, and its central studio-tower of non-conductive brick, a new *professionalism*. And—again personally—I was in favour of anything that helped to free broadcasting from the embrace and the label of “amateur.” Also, from the point of view of the work of my own department, I had been handsomely done by. Two Dramatic Control Panels—later increased to three—separated from their studios by one and two floors respectively, and with invigorating views across the roof-tops of London, combined with no less than seven studios specially constructed for the permutations and combinations of radio plays, gave promise of infinite and agreeable possibilities. And, if my own office was a queer shape, it no longer resembled a permanently draught-ridden corridor.

I wonder if there may not be some truth in my suspicion that much of the criticism levelled against the new headquarters of the Corporation did not arise from the fact that it was being brought home to quite a number of people, and too rapidly for their comfort and peace of mind, that broadcasting had become a really vital factor in modern life; that it had to be taken seriously. An organisation of cheerful amateurs, however enthusiastic, draped with the trimmings of “cats’ whiskers”; “aunts” and “uncles” of a charming but ingenuous Children’s Hour which found unvarying humorous delight in “Hello Twins”; the equally ingenuous *Grand Good-night* of J. C. Stobart with its singular expression of a cosmic good-will; might fill the idler hours of the petty *bourgeoisie* and the servants’ hall. The move to Portland Place symbolised the putting away of these childish things; the realisation by broadcasters of their power and their responsibilities. Such realisation was by no means universally popular or well-received.

This new attitude of mind towards broadcasting in general was having considerable repercussions within the comparatively limited sphere of radio drama. The possibilities of the broadcast play were becoming apparent to people other, and far more important, than the few young men who had ploughed a lonely furrow, stimulated by the protection of a monopoly, and guyed for their excessive height or their unfashionable tendency to grow beards . . .

‘I am grateful to Mr. Compton Mackenzie for many things beside the pleasure—shared with so many thousands of readers—given to me by *The Passionate Elopement*, by *Carnival*, by the two volumes of *Sinister Street*, and by *Gallipoli Memories*. I owe to him my first sight of the Channel Islands on an Easter morning, and the possession of one of my best-loved Siamese cats. But I think my greatest debt to him arose from the fact that he was the first celebrity

who, idealised during my adolescence, did not disappoint me when I met him. It is a good rule, if you have lovely illusions about the theatre, to avoid the stage-door and shun introductions to ladies whose charms outshine the footlights behind which they move with such elegance and charm. In general it seems to be asking too much of the famous and the great to expect them to live up to their reputations at close quarters. There was the case of the eminent comedian who appeared in a broadcasting studio in full evening dress, and then proceeded to blur the picturesque impression of a past heroic age by his use of a handy receptacle designed for cigarette-ends as a spittoon . . .

The notion that *Carnival* might not unworthily be transferred to the medium of the microphone originated—like so many notable broadcasting schemes of the time—in the active imagination of Eric Maschwitz. Like myself he had been considerably, if not altogether willingly, impressed by Sieveking's achievement with *The First Kaleidoscope*. If only—we thought, and murmured across the proof-sheets of the *Radio Times*—if only the story had been a real story: a story about interesting characters, instead of symbols in a setting palpably machine-made to suit a new type of story-telling machinery!

"Why on earth," Eric continued, "not bring to life someone like Jenny Pearl?"

And, before the iron had time to cool, he had written to Compton Mackenzie for permission to adapt my favourite, and what I hope will remain the most famous, of all his novels.

I confess that I was profoundly sceptical as to the probable outcome. At best I expected agreement, frigidly expressed, uninterestedly detached. I should have known better. The lover of islands, the author of *The Windsor Tapestry*, the champion of Scottish Nationalism, was precisely the man to whom to appeal for support of a cause so hypothetically forlorn. He not only agreed to the adaptation being made. He agreed with enthusiasm. He appeared in London. He encouraged us to encourage him to suggest, to amend, and—above all—to talk. Other patrons of an oyster-bar, sufficiently well-known, were frequently surprised by the sight and sound of Mackenzie, Maschwitz, and Gielgud, interrupting the solemnity of oysters and stout with snatches of song, as one or the other of us pleaded for the inclusion of this or that "theme" melody, for this or that popular song of the Edwardian heyday when "the Orient Palace of Varieties rose like a cliff from the drapery shops of Piccadilly." How different, both in atmosphere and in results, would be the average film-story conference, if only it could be conducted in the fine careless enthusiasm—indeed in the frenzy—of those meetings which preceded the first broadcasting production of *Carnival*! No room here for the

strange theory that because two authors may be better than one, then nineteen authors must necessarily be nineteen times better still. No question here of clothing very dry bones with *ersatz* flesh. Compton Mackenzie displayed no tediously false modesty. He did not attempt to disguise the fact that he had a peculiar tenderness for this book, nor that he believed it to be good. Maschwitz shared both the opinion and the tenderness. He was, indeed, so steeped in the essential spirit of the novel, that I have heard Mackenzie claim to recognise as his own lines of dialogue invented by Maschwitz. Last, but by no means least, the author consented to read his own linking narrative for the production. And for me the climax of an unforgettable experience was to meet him emerging from the seclusion of the narrator's studio when all was over, and to see his cheeks as tear-stained as my own. If the production of *The First Kaleidoscope* was the proving of the Dramatic-Control Panel, the production of *Carnival* was certainly its justification. Its opening sequence—the narrator's voice fading into the background of the Islington mean street, with its trams, the screaming children, and the barrel-organ—Madame Aldavini's dancing-class, the Glasgow pantomime, the Eton Boating Song at the Covent Garden Ball, the child-birth sequence with its cross-cut flashbacks, the love scenes in the hansom cab—so exquisitely played by Lilian Harrison and Harman Grisewood—the first actual, the second in retrospect so curiously and effectively disembodied by the use of artificial echo; all these things were welded into a pattern which in spite of its complexity and colour was yet essentially "easy on the ear." No longer could it be argued that the broadcast play should be restricted to two or three voices and an A-B-C setting. The big canvas, on which Cecil Lewis had experimented excitingly with *Lord Jim*, could now be recognised as a regular feature in the broadcasting gallery. It was not surprising that Peter Cresswell, who produced that first *Carnival* should have tried his hand later upon Conrad's *Romance*, and in the process should have achieved what I still believe to be the finest large-scale effects of seascapes, ships, and crowds that I have ever heard.

I think it is fair to claim that during the early thirties the prestige of broadcast plays and playing rose by leaps and bounds. Henry Ainley played "Othello" to my brother John's "Iago." Flecker's *Hassan* was performed at full length with an all-star cast, and demonstrated—particularly in the scenes of the Procession of Protracted Death and the Ghosts in the Garden—that imagination stimulated by the ear could give points to theatrical contrivance however lavish and ingenious. Tyrone Guthrie—with *Squirrel's Cage* and *The Flowers Are Not for You to Pick*—and L. du Garde Peach—with *The Path of Glory*—showed what radio could do respectively with the sub-conscious mind, and the satiric approach.

It has been a persistent source of distress to me personally, and of very real loss to broadcasting, that these two authors should have allowed the stage and the cinema to have deprived radio almost entirely of their talent. Du Garde Peach still occasionally writes for the Children's Hour. Guthrie has returned from his labours on behalf of the Old Vic from time to time notably with his productions of *The Three Musketeers*, and *L'Intérieur* of Maeterlinck; less happily with his stage production of *Macbeth*, featuring Charles Laughton. (The attempt was made to broadcast on this occasion with an entire stage cast, and without scripts. I fear that it was not altogether without amusement that professional broadcasters saw a prompter dragged in during actual transmission, with results by no means satisfactory!) But these are two outstanding cases which to some extent justify the reproach that the B.B.C. can never hope to compete on equal grounds with the professional and entertainment industry, until it can offer economic rewards sufficiently attractive to keep discovered and acknowledged talent to itself.

Among other outstanding radio plays I owed two to the activities of a daily newspaper, which, at the time, was not exactly prominent for the display of goodwill towards the activities of my department. It was announced that the B.B.C. intended to broadcast Patrick Hamilton's *Rope*, with Mr. Ernest Milton in his original part. The newspaper in question promptly opened with all its guns. The Corporation was assailed for "morbidity" and "sensationalism." The opinions of various eminent divines were invited, and published. Readers were incited to listen and to be appalled. I doubt if any radio play, previous to the famous *Man Born to be King* series, was ever so gratuitously publicised. The Corporation, however, remained curiously unmoved. *Rope* was produced. And, largely thanks to first-class performance, proved remarkably successful. The listening public showed its usual fundamental commonsense, and declined to be panicked, even when the *Morning Post* joined boisterously in the witch-hunt. Patrick Hamilton was not unreasonably gratified. He proceeded to show—with *Money with Menaces* and *To the Public Danger*—that his sense of the microphone was equal to his sense of the theatre. And the newspapers in question were left to find other sticks with which to beat their favourite dog. . . .

I suppose that if I were asked to name my own best personal "scoop," I should inevitably recall the first presentation of Miss Elizabeth Bergner in England in a broadcast performance of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. I fear that in this country the reputation of Miss Bergner is no longer what it was. The unhappy fiasco of *The Boy David* seemed to confirm a point of view insisted upon with a determination hardly chivalrous by certain critics, that Miss Bergner's talents had been vastly over-praised; that her charm was revealed, by continual



repetition, as mere mannerism; that the "whimsiness" of her "Rosalind" in the film version of *As You Like It* was not what anybody liked—least of all Shakespeare; that the cutting of the famous "bells" speech in her performance of *Saint Joan* showed an almost incredible lack of sensitivity.

Personally I think that idolatry changed too easily to condemnation. I can, of course, speak only of my own experience. I had seen Miss Bergner play in three German films, notably in *Ariane* and been completely captivated. My father had told me of magnificent performances he had seen her give in Berlin in *Saint Joan* and *The Constant Nymph*—both, naturally, in German. And my father is the most severe critic both of plays and players that I know. When I heard that she was in England I was immensely curious to meet her, and firmly determined, if by any means it could be accomplished, to bring her to the microphone.

I had anticipated every kind of difficulty. It is not hard, as a rule, to induce film stars to broadcast. They are very sensible of publicity values and possibilities. But they are inclined to prefer the brief personal appearance in the shape of an interview, to the hard labour of performance in a broadcast play. Sometimes they are wise. There was a young American "star," who had—and has—a considerable Hollywood reputation as an actress. Her agent insisted, while she was on a visit to London, that she should broadcast in a scene from one of Shakespeare's tragedies. The result—in spite of Mr. Ion Swinley's magnificent supporting efforts—was not a happy one, resembling, as it did, the painstaking performance of a schoolgirl reading at an end-of-term beano for parents and guardians. But that is another story. . . .

Elizabeth Bergner, however, proved both approachable, and amenable. She seemed charmingly anxious to play for us. She did not make fantastic stipulations about her salary, the choice of play, nor even about the size of her portrait in the *Radio Times*. The only fly in the ointment—and it was a large-sized one—lay in the fact that at this time her command of English was at a stage only be called elementary. The problem of accent was easily solved by the selection of a foreign play. But the language difficulty could only be surmounted in one way: by hard and unremitting study. To this task she set herself forthwith; with a professional teacher during the day; with me in the evenings and into the smaller hours of the morning. After which we would eat apples in a state of companionable exhaustion, and I would walk home thanking heaven, not for the first or the last time, that I lived within easy distance of the West End. Whatever the ultimate verdict upon her subsequent stage performances, I believe that her playing of "Hedwig" in *The Wild Duck* was of the stuff of great acting, and that, in England at any rate, she never did anything

better. Nor do I remember any actress more responsive to direction, more delightful to work with.

It was about this time that I found myself in considerable hot water with some of the leading lights of the theatrical profession. I was tempted in some interview to commit myself to the statement that Shakespeare could be interpreted more successfully through the broadcasting medium than on the stage. What I meant, of course, was that at that particular moment—the Bard was being butchered by M. Komisarjevsky to make a Stratford holiday, and the Old Vic neither what it had been nor what it was soon to become again—the B.B.C., with the aid of such fine Shakespearean actors as Mr. Ainley, Miss Ashcroft, Mr. Leslie French, Miss Angela Baddeley, and my brother John, was filling an aching void rather more than competently. A notably fine performance of *The Tempest* admirably adapted by E. A. Harding, had just provoked much favourable comment. But nothing would appease the wrath of the old stagers. Sir Cedric Hardwick dismissed the mere suggestion as "silly." Mr. William Powell made the curious assertion that he had given the whole of his life to getting the words of Shakespeare spoken naturally, and that it was impossible to speak through a microphone other than artificially! Various other distinguished persons were equally scathing. I was somewhat alarmed at the raising of such a storm, until fortified by an article in no less majestic a journal than the *Morning Post*, supported by the lighter artillery of the *Star*, in which at any rate my good intentions were more or less taken for granted, and the hint was dropped to the stage that it could hardly afford to "high-hat" the B.B.C.'s approach to Shakespeare, considering its own temporary neglect.

The episode is only worth recalling as illustrating two things: the rather oddly proprietary attitude of certain individuals towards Shakespeare; and the growing tendency on the part of people, connected with mediums of entertainment less conservative than the legitimate theatre, to make use of, if not to exploit, Shakespeare's genius.

Actually no one is less entitled than the so-called "representative" actor to howl the place down with indignation because Shakespeare is handled in some new or unfamiliar way. Whatever may have been the crimes of annotators, of dons, of hyper-imaginative biographers, no one has laid such violent hands upon Shakespeare, mutilating his text, distorting his meaning, turning him into no more than a vehicle for star-performance, than the actor. It is indeed the actor who will be found justifying such activities by claiming Shakespeare as actor rather than author, or at least as "practical man of the theatre"—by which apparently he means a second-rate literary hack, engaged to lick the boots of Burbidge and flatter his vanity.

I was brought up, as I have said, very much in the tradition of the

Lyceum of Irving and Ellen Terry. For years I believed that, although I had never seen them, the Shakespearean performances of these great actors represented all that was best in the English theatre. I read of Irving's "thoughtful dignity" in *Hamlet*, of his "gaunt famished wolfish" "Macbeth," of Ellen Terry's "Beatrice" which seemed in truth to have been born under a dancing star. And then on one unfortunate birthday I was presented by one of my relatives with the pocket copy of *King Lear*, which Irving had used to make his acting version. Most of the annotations, being in faded pencil, were illegible. The "cuts," however, were only too plain. And, while I remain assured of Irving's greatness as an actor, I can never again be convinced either of his taste, or of his integrity as a Shakespearean. Those "cuts" had to be seen to be believed. They not only subscribed, in the most mealy mouthed fashion, to late Victorian prudery. They proved their author profoundly unaware of any quality in the play beyond its theatrical effectiveness, the opportunities afforded to the leading player. And in several cases they made flaring nonsense of the text. I have been rebuked—notably by the late Mr. Herbert Farjeon—for the violence inevitably done to Shakespearean texts by the compression required for purposes of broadcast performance. He once quoted with ghoulish satisfaction what must have indeed been a grisly experience: of sitting with a copy of *Henry V* on his knee during a broadcast of that play, and adding up the number of lines cut. They came, he claimed, to four hundred odd! But I never heard of Mr. Farjeon, in his capacity of dramatic, as opposed to broadcasting critic, applying such a test to any play of Shakespeare's as acted on the stage. . . .

It would be easier to understand the wrath and indignation aroused in theatrical breasts by essays in the broadcasting—and, even more, in the filming—of the plays of Shakespeare, if reverence and integrity had been the rule in the stage handling of such works instead of the exception. In general, the theatre is hardly in any position to cast stones. There is, further, the point to be made, that if Shakespeare was the practical man of the entertainment world, which so many actors claim, then it is fair also to claim that he would not have been so unpractical, so unworldly, as to have ignored mediums with such vast possibilities of popular appeal as the screen and the microphone. I do not think it is too much to claim that Shakespeare was profoundly conscious of the maddening limitations imposed upon his imaginative genius by the limitations of the Elizabethan playhouse; that he would have been delighted to have seen his "rusty foils" replaced by the now-famous charge of the horsed French knights in the Laurence Olivier-Dallas Bower film of *Henry V*. Alternatively, he might well have preferred the freedom of imagination offered to a listening audience, to such puerilities as live rabbits in a stage version of

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the playing of "Ariel" by middle-aged actresses. Shakespeare was writer first last and all the time. That his work and its performance was conditioned by the limitations of contemporary circumstances was his misfortune rather than his privilege.

All this is neither to assert nor to imply that the problem of how best to present Shakespeare through the medium of the microphone has been solved. Many different methods have been essayed during the last fifteen years. None has been altogether successful in dealing with the two main troubles: the factor of time; and the confusion unavoidable in any play broadcast, which contains a large number of minor characters not immediately distinguishable from each other. There are still many people who plead that Selected Scenes from Shakespeare's plays are all that the microphone can safely tackle. This may be true of Broadcasts to Schools, though personally I persist in believing that as a method it is perilously akin to too explicit an educational approach; to the teaching of Shakespeare with the help of voluminous footnotes. There are others who would follow the tradition of the old actor-managers, and have the plays edited frankly to result merely as first-rate acting vehicles. There are others still who would preserve textual purity at all costs, regardless alike of the practical necessities of programme time-schedules, and of the possibility of boring thousands of listeners into switching off. While a few would be content so long as the treatment was in some—almost in any—sense of the word "experimental." Modern dress being out of the question, and corrugated iron scenery superfluous, they yearn for radio production with the original Elizabethan pronunciation; for the clowns to be played by contemporary music-hall celebrities; for serialisation in a popular vein; indeed, for almost anything that will give the aforementioned purists blue fits. . . .

Of all the various approaches to the problem that have been made, I am inclined to think that the best were one adaptation of *The Tempest*; and Mr. Farjeon's *Shakespearian Characters*. In the former—it has the great advantage for the microphone of being in any event one of the shorter plays, with good opportunity for use of appropriate music, and the establishment of unearthly atmosphere—Mr. Harding took the bull by the horns and removed the sub-plot of the lords' conspiracy bodily from the play. It became as a result a tauter and tighter dramatic piece. Several of the confusing unimportant minor characters were disposed of. It made much easier listening. And the length did not go unreasonably far beyond that to which the radio-dramatic audience was accustomed. In the latter Mr. Farjeon deliberately painted on a number of small as opposed to a few large canvases. His series was confined to half-hours; to characteristic aspects of the plays and not to the plays themselves. These pro-

grammes, designed specifically with the limitations of the medium in mind, were in my view far more successful than Mr. Farjeon's editing for broadcasting of several full-length versions, in which the actors—overawed perhaps by the purist approach—gave admirable readings, but, for the most part, pretty dull performances.

And yet I am not sure whether after all the actor-managers may not have been right in their belief that the main interest of any performance of a Shakespeare play must—and should—lie in its acting. And whatever the shortcomings of broadcast presentation may have been, there have been numerous outstanding acting performances on the air. I remember the exquisite *Romeo and Juliet* of Fay Compton and Marius Goring; an "Iago" of my brother John's, which should surely have before now have reached the stage; two superbly contrasting "Antonys" in Leon Quartermaine and Godfrey Tearle; the "Cleopatra" of Constance Cummings, unconventional, but always interesting and of a terrific vitality; the best "Ariel," "Caliban" and "Prospero" that I can imagine, in Leslie French, Ralph Richardson, and my brother; Stephen Haggard's "Hamlet"; Robert Helpmann's "Oberon." It is a list which could be considerably lengthened. But it is, I feel, sufficient to show that as far as Shakespeare has been concerned, broadcasting has not failed to offer to "stars" the acting opportunities which he provides, apart from considering his work as poetry, as literature, and as a never-failing source of fascination from the production and presentation angles. Nor is it too much to hope that before long Television will arrive to provide a solution for the insoluble. . . .

Of innumerable Broadcasting House productions two remain most firmly fixed in my memory—for very different reasons: Flecker's *Hassan*, and Noel Coward's *Cavalcade*.

I must confess to having been completely enthralled by Flecker's play when I first read it as an undergraduate; to thinking of it in those days, not only as superb melodrama—which it is—but also as great literature—which it probably is not. Anyhow, *Hassan* unbalanced my critical judgement to the point of inducing me to stand from ten o'clock in the morning outside His Majesty's Theatre until the Pit opened on the first night of Mr. Basil Dean's production. I fear I have never done as much for any other theatrical enterprise. It was an unforgettable experience which should also have been—and yet somehow was not—a triumph. I wondered why. Mr. Ainley was not, perhaps, at the top of his form. The beauty of most of the settings was qualified by two singular lapses: a fountain, dead-centre, in the famous garden scene, which appeared to have been covered with silver-paper and imported from a fashionable confectioner's; and a mistake in the lighting of the final tableau, when the mysterious distances of the Golden Road were mercilessly revealed as no more than painted

"flats." Yet there had been so much to enjoy, so much to admire, that such criticisms seemed carping and disproportionate. It was only later that I realised that the omission from the stage production of the scene between the ghosts of "Pervaneh" and "Rafi" had gone far towards knocking the bottom out of the play. The horror of the Procession of Protracted Death lost its artistic climax without the greater horror of the icy wind sweeping the hapless spirits into limbo and oblivion. No doubt there were sufficient reasons for the omission: problems of time, or problems of staging. None the less, I believe it to have been capital.

The music of Delius and the splendour of the language combined to make *Hassan* a most tempting proposition for broadcasting. Against it was its length—and a good many details of the plot, which might well have been described as "so unlike the private life of our dear Queen." Cecil Lewis, however, persisted with his usual vitality, and handled the first broadcast production from Savoy Hill. But I believe I am right in claiming that my Broadcasting House production was the first done of the play in its entirety. An interval was allowed for the News—and for the more primitive needs of conscientious listeners—half-way through; setting a precedent since followed successfully in productions of *St. Joan*, and of various Shakespearian plays, notably *Antony and Cleopatra*. I was so fortunate as to secure the services of Mr. Ainley, Mr. Malcolm Keen, Mr. Leon Quartermaine, and Mr. Swinley from the original cast. And, with the aid of an Echo Room, and a recording of wind which had been specially made for quite another purpose, the tragic disembodiment of the ghosts in the garden was most eerily and triumphantly achieved. Once more, so it seemed to me, imagination had been enabled to score at the expense of scenery; sound at the expense of sight. I do not think that personally I shall mind particularly if I never *see* the play again. . . .

If *Hassan* remains vivid in my memory as something of a triumph, *Cavalcade* does the same thing for having hovered perilously near the brink of fiasco. The story is perhaps worth telling as illustrative of what may at any moment befall the most carefully rehearsed or admirably acted broadcast play. Everyone familiar with *Cavalcade* will at once appreciate that technically it was bound to be a pretty complicated job. The canvas is wide. The number, both of scenes and characters, is large. A carefully designed "production-graph," which should ensure a smoothly flowing continuity was essential. Here was an outstanding instance where the use of several studios, and of the Dramatic-Control Panel, was justified. The cast was distributed and rehearsed in three separate—though adjacent—studios in such a way that no scene was played in the same studio as the preceding one. Rehearsals, distinguished by an out-

standing and moving performance by Miss Mary O'Farrell, and in spite of the alarming complexity of some of the most necessary effects sequences, went well. And with the support of Felix Felton at the Panel, and of Fred Bell as studio-manager (this was before the days of gaily trousered young ladies, known officially as Junior Programme Engineers, and affectionately as "Jeeps") I was reasonably confident of success.

The performance went away to an excellent start. Then, at the close of the first scene "below-stairs" in the Marryot household—which was being played in Studio 7C—the curtain line was not spoken. This seemed odd, for the actress, Miss Joyce Barbour, had played so far with both confidence and skill. I looked anxiously at Felton, and we cross-faded—rather too quickly—to the Effects Studio, and the tolling bell which preceded the famous scene of Queen Victoria's funeral procession. It was at this moment that an engineer hurried in from Control Room with the startling information that the missing line had been no slip on the part of Miss Barbour. Studio 7C had chosen this moment of all others to "pack up." Agitated, and I fear blasphemous, enquiry produced the reply that there was no way of effecting the necessary repairs during the course of transmission. This meant, not only that a third of our speech-studio accommodation disappeared; but also that the whole of our elaborate production-graph—the distribution of casts for individual scenes, the sequence of continuity fades on the Panel—was rendered useless.

In a way it must be admitted that the gods had been merciful. If the break had occurred in the middle of a scene instead of right at the end of one, nothing could have saved us from humiliating apology combined with the explanation of "a technical hitch." But the question was, could we keep running? It seemed more than likely that the actors might pardonably become confused, or that the Panel-working might in the new conditions prove impossible, or both. We could only do our best, and keep our heads.

In our heated imaginations, at any rate, no funeral bell ever tolled so dismally or at such intolerable length. But during that tolling, and the brief scene which followed it, we achieved a "lash-up" method of practical working. Leaving the care of the scene being actually performed to Felton, I worked on the script a scene ahead, planning the necessary studio and Panel alterations. From two floors below Fred Bell and another studio-manager ran almost continually between Panel Room and the studios, taking the altered lay-out from me as it was made, and returning to shepherd their flock to the appropriate microphones. Until the end of the performance we could never be absolutely certain that we might not arrive at a scene, and find that we had no studio to put it in! *Horresco referens!* But the gods continued to be kind, and all ended well. What was even more remarkable

was that neither listener nor critic seemed to have noticed the lost line, and the unreasonable drawing-out of the funeral effects. I have never been nearer to actual disaster during a transmission. And in this instance disaster could not have been avoided, but for the energy and good sense of the studio-managers. Whatever their label, their contribution to efficient broadcasting is as important as it is unspectacular. And among professional broadcasters such names as Bell, Ladbroke, and D. H. Munro should not be forgotten. Most producers have owed more to them than, probably, they have ever realised.

## CHAPTER X

### GENERAL TENDENCIES OF CONTEMPORARY ENTERTAINMENT

Few people nowadays are so courageous as to uphold the theory that nations get the governments they deserve. In an age generally labelled democratic, the reflection upon the ordinary man and woman would be too obviously damning. And Sir Osbert Sitwell and Mr. Patrick Hamilton seem almost alone in carrying high the banner of the forlorn hope against the smug self-satisfaction of that self-christened hero, the Little Man. I believe that among my acquaintances I am classed as "reactionary" in my views; partly because I believe that the reading of history is a better guide to the future than wishful thinking or humanitarianism—however admirably motivated; partly because I believe that history should be written by professional historians, rather than by novelists with a scientific bent, or scientists with a bent towards novel-writing; partly because I believe that the Brains Trust is capital fun, but hardly a Guide to a Brave New World; and especially because I believe that in any imperfect society Privilege is bound to exist, and that therefore it would be a good thing if Privilege could be limited to those who are prepared to shoulder Responsibility. It seems that this last belief places one irrevocably in the Middle Ages, spiritually speaking. I will admit that during the last few years I have been tempted to wonder whether it might not have made an agreeable change, had one been able to put a physical Time Machine into reverse.—. . .

I am, however, assured on all sides that "it is impossible to put back the clock"; and that my ingrained scepticism as to whether the direction of all so-called Progress may not be in a perfect circle, is frivolous or blasphemous or both. Progress may, roughly speaking, be defined as "going on." Certainly during the last thirty years or so Entertainment has been "going on" like anything, sometimes at an alarming rate. It may perhaps be interesting to consider just where it is going, and why.



It seems to me that in the main two things have happened. On the one hand, Entertainment has been made accessible to vastly greater numbers of people than ever before. Which is undoubtedly a good thing. On the other, Entertainment has become infinitely cheaper, infinitely easier and more comfortable as an activity. Which may not, on consideration, be quite such a good thing. Once admitted—it is a large admission—that the products of theatre, of cinema, and of broadcasting are of benefit to human society, it is clearly right that as many people as possible should have access to them; that they should *be able* to see and to listen, both physically and economically. No one surely will argue against the desirability of having a theatre in every sizable town; a cinema in every village; a loud-speaker—under proper control!—in every home. Ideally everyone has a right to profit from artistic and scientific achievement.

Yet somehow there seems to be a catch in it. Can it be that human nature is so perverse that it will only value what is difficult or painful of achievement? Can it be that Listening in the Home, Plush Seats and the Mighty Wurlitzer, the Municipal Subsidy for the Theatre, while catering comprehensibly enough for the weaknesses of the flesh tend to dull alike receptive ardour and critical spirit? The long queues outside theatres and cinemas; the figures, always steadily mounting, of radio listeners compiled so diligently and ingeniously by a special department of the B.B.C.; these combine to paint a picture of Democracy's hungering sheep crowding towards lush pasturage. Is it entirely cynical to feel that the dull eyes and mechanically chewing jaws repeated almost to infinity along those queues, the persistence of "tap-listening" by individuals too lazy to turn a switch or read a programme, the applause on first-nights indicative less of appreciation than of neurotic hysteria, prove the age-old truth: you can get no more out of a thing than you are prepared to put into it? Is there not ground for fearing that Entertainment is rapidly ceasing to become a Pleasure in proportion as it becomes a Habit? It was clearly wrong that the sheep should look up and not be fed. Is it right that they should be fed in such conditions, or on such food, that their eyes are never lifted from the ground?

The change itself has been sufficiently remarkable. My father has told me how, in the days of Irving's tenure of the Lyceum, a visit to the queue for the pit approximated to a free-for-all fight. Ladies would seldom be included in the party. If they were, they were placed within the ring of their escorts, and adjured to be careful to keep their feet when the doors at last were opened, and the invariable rush occurred. Such scenes proved abhorrent to the softer Edwardian civilisation. Strength was allowed to prevail no longer. Stark endurance took its place. I have already mentioned how I stood for nearly ten hours for the pit on the first night of *Hassan*. And in past years I have seen

enthusiasts lining up in the evening for an opening on the following night. To-day such a sight is rare.\* As a rule a camp-stool is at the disposal of the "pittite," its position in the queue guaranteed by a name-card laid upon its seat. No doubt much weariness and apparent waste of time are avoided. But I am sure that considerable exhilaration, giving added savour to the entertainment that followed, is lost also. Criticism was apt to be sharpened by those long waits upon unyielding pavements, so often in wind and rain. You expected something for your trouble. You were resentful if you did not get it. The abolition of the pit in some theatres, the decay of the standing queue outside most, have surely contributed to a lowered standard of theatrical enterprise.

In the Victorian theatre comfort, outside the stalls and boxes, seems hardly to have entered into the considerations of architects or managers. In the cinema, it is not unfair to assert, the claims of physical comfort are preferred beyond all other considerations whatsoever; comfort considered in terms for the most part of the woman's magazine. It is almost certainly true that plenty of people still go into cinemas as much for the sake of enjoying plush seating, easy accessibility to tea and ice-creams, subdued lighting—with all that that implies—and central heating, as for the sake of seeing films. An evil tradition was established in the days when "the pictures" invariably ran non-stop, and audiences went in cheerfully regardless of beginnings or ends. People still tend to feel aggrieved, if it is suggested to them that they should actually interfere with the normal routine of their lives—by altering their dinner-hour for example—in order to arrive at a cinema in time for the scheduled beginning of a particular film. The taking of trouble to intensify appreciation and enjoyment is apparently undemocratic and unfashionable. And in some obscure and unexplained way it is the entertainment industry which is at fault. The film you want to see is expected to start just as the moment when you happen to be along—even when "you" implies two or three hundred people.

What is true of the cinema is even more poignantly true of broadcasting. How often have I heard the complaint that such and such a particular programme item is never on the air! What is meant is that the would-be listener has never happened to catch such and such an item when he or she has happened to switch on a set. No slogan is more consistently ignored than "Keep a Date with your Radio." No periodical would seem to be read with less attention to its practical usefulness than the *Radio Times*.

Personally I have always been in favour of Less but Better Broadcasting. My colleagues assure me that I am barking up a hopelessly wrong tree—though they have not to date added whether the tree should be of the Weeping Willow or Monkey Puzzle variety. It

\* Except of course, for the Ballet and the latest Old Vic season.

seems to me that a service which is "on tap" for all the day and much of the night; which encourages easy listening by adding one "fixed item" after another to its programme schedules; which encourages every listener to believe that by the payment of his almost insignificant license fee he is entitled as of right to find something which he personally desires to hear at his disposal at any moment; can never hope to establish a genuine artistic or aesthetic prestige. It is, of course, fair and reasonable to argue on behalf of the prevailing view that Broadcasting—and British Broadcasting in particular, being both a national monopoly and a Service—ought not to concern itself too closely with the purely artistic standpoint. It is good enough if its professional craft, whatever the standards of content and output, can be made irreproachable. None the less I am rendered uneasy on broadcasting's behalf, when I see people playing bridge, while a Talk by some celebrated personage booms unregarded in the background; when the dog is washed to the accompaniment of symphonic music; or when the daily help, who is banging about cheerfully upstairs to the distant sound of a lesson in elementary German from the loudspeaker, replies to a curious questioner that "she likes company!"

It may be that both Solitude and Silence have become as definitely of the past as the hansom-cab and the muffin-bell. I suppose it is unlikely that the sky will ever be free again of the roar of aeroplane engines, the factories of "Music While You Work." I remember as far back as 1932, going on a short holiday with the fixed determination that I would find a place in which I could be certain of avoiding broadcasting in any form. I found a remote village on the Baltic shore of the Polish Corridor: remote enough for eagles to fly overhead, and an occasional bear-cub to amble fubsily across clearings in the woods. And yet loudspeakers, under no sort of control, boomed cheerfully each evening from the only two sizeable villas to remind me of the continuing existence of Mr. Jack Payne and his Band. While on the little cargo-boat which took me back from Gdynia to Hull, the captain would take no denial of showing off his newly-installed wireless set, by taking me on an aural tour of the radio stations of Europe. It would almost seem that Silence and Solitude have become so unfamiliar to the average person that they have become frightening. They have become, as it were, infected with that Terror which is part of everything Unknown. People who once were exasperated by noise, seem now almost unable to endure existence without having their nervous systems stimulated by continual sound. "Tap-listening" in consequence is not only tolerated; it is actively catered for. As I write I am told of an organisation already operating, or about to operate, in the United States, which will provide "crooning" in all its forms as a twenty-four-hour-a-day service. It is a solemn thought.

Against such competition what chance has the serious programme-

item in a broadcasting schedule? The wireless-set has become just one of those "modern conveniences." It is like the bath-water, the gas, or the electric light—except that if it is not turned off it neither overflows to ruin the carpet, nor adds appreciably to the quarterly bills. If I speak with an apparently humourless emphasis on the point, it is because nothing has suffered more from this attitude of the listening audience than the radio play. It is impossible to understand—let alone to enjoy—a play broadcast unless it is heard from its beginning; unless it is listened to without distraction. Yet savage criticism is frequently levelled against such plays by listeners who switched on half-way through, or gave the actors what attention was not already absorbed by a game of cards. And I have known audiences surprised, almost shocked, when I have suggested in lectures on the subject that they would not take a bridge-table, or a group of gossiping friends, or the family washing with them to a theatre; and that if they found anyone else doing so, they would probably complain to the management. "Do you then expect," they will say, "that we should give up all our waking hours to concentrated listening? We are busy. We have work to do, friends to see, households to care for. To expect us to take broadcasting seriously is too much of a good thing!" The answer of course is "no." A lady once wrote to me at considerable length, and in a distinctly critical tone, regarding the work of my department at Broadcasting House. She closed her letter with what she believed to be a veritable *coup de massue*. "I have never listened," she wrote, "for less than eight hours a day for the past four years." It was with difficulty that I resisted the temptation to point out that she was qualifying less obviously as an unpaid critic of radio drama, than for a padded cell. You can, and should, no more try to listen to broadcasting all day and every day, than you should go to the theatre or the cinema every day, or eat the food you particularly fancy at breakfast, luncheon and dinner, and between meals into the bargain.

Is it too pessimistic a viewpoint to note with gloom a pretty general acceptance of decay of a sense of real values? A pretty general tendency to replace the good by the glittering, the tasteful by the noisy? An ex-colleague of mine, baited out of his usual urbanity by jibes at a variety programme for which he was responsible, exclaimed furiously, "All that a programme of that sort needs is to be as loud and as fast as possible!" While on the audience side of the picture I feel record should be made of the indignant correspondent who wrote—after a broadcast performance of *A Butterfly on the Wheel*—accusing the B.B.C. of "making mixed listening impossible!"

Perhaps the most obvious example of this particular tendency was seen when the place in the London Theatre previously held by Mr. C. B. Cochran was allowed to be usurped by the late Mr. George Black.

That a combination of ill-health and ill-fortune should have deprived the entertainment world almost completely of Mr. Cochran's touch during the past few years has been nothing less than a tragedy. If he called himself "a showman," he was in fact something very much more important. He was not only an enthusiast. Mr. Black was that. It was not that he had an unrivalled flair for publicity. Mr. Black beat him to it. It was not that he realised the vital importance, especially in the theatre, of not spoiling ships for ha'porths of tar. Mr. Black's expenditure was both lavish and generous. But Mr. Cochran touched nothing that he did not adorn—and for the most part touched nothing that was not worth touching. He realised that the theatre was international. We owed him the sight of Yvonne Printemps and Sacha Guitry. When he wanted *revue* he would look to Noel Coward, to Beverley Nichols to James Laver. When he wanted designers he would look to Oliver Messel and Doris Zinkeisen. He had taste. He believed in "style." Instead of cheapening theatre tickets he raised the price of his first-night seats to a guinea. And though some old-stagers scoffed, or were indignant, or accused him of "snobbism," the prestige of the West End stage was raised. A Cochran production became automatically an affair of importance in the international artistic world. And the result was to pour hope and encouragement and the desire to emulate into the hearts of actors, playwrights, designers, even of rival managers.

On the other hand popular support enabled Mr. Black to believe that he had followed the line of true succession, when he had only mistaken the shadow for the substance of Mr. Cochran's achievement. In fact he was not even an adequate disciple, an Elisha to an Elijah. It is difficult to conceive Mr. Cochran bothering to stage a dramatised version of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. It is starkly impossible to imagine him sponsoring a version patently shoddy; a piece utterly lacking in the genuine stuff of *grand guignol*, which alone could have justified the experiment. Mr. Cochran would no doubt have sympathised with Mr. Black's urgent desire to spotlight the younger generation of light musical talent in *Strike a New Note*. He would quite certainly have insisted that more than one note should be struck, and that on instruments in addition to the Big Drum. With the Crazy Gang Mr. Black injected new blood—and by no means before it was time for the operation—into the hardening arteries of the Music Hall. For practical purposes that was the end of his contribution to contemporary entertainment. For the conquest of new worlds he was simply not equipped. He had any amount of enthusiasm. He was a practical man of the theatre. But he lacked both the taste and the background necessary for the great *entrepreneur*. And yet he was popularly accepted as such. The critics—pleasantly and naturally, if unprofessionally, prejudiced by their ingrained and patriotic love

for the Music Hall—did not feel called upon to correct the mistake. . . .

It may be that this decay of a sense of values must in the long run be laid, ironically enough, at the door of popular education: more specifically, of popular pseudo-education. Unhappily education is, and must always be, a process essentially gradual. Before the mass of people is educated at all, it is prepared to accept the taste and the standards of the fortunate and privileged few. Once taught to read and to think for itself, the mass not only tends, but is actively encouraged, to question such taste and standards, whether in fact they are good or bad, and during a period of its own intellectual development when to form balanced judgement and achieve any measure of aesthetic integrity is almost impossible. The mass, during the intermediate stages of education, is bound to be adolescent in its entertainment taste, impatient of the classic, questioning of accepted standards; in a word, to be puppyish. And, while the puppy has charm and vitality, it too frequently makes itself sick by over-eating, or destroys the furniture out of excess of vitality, and the household peace by its uncritical addiction to noise.

To this must be added that most curious of Contemporary Cults: the enhaloing of the Little Man. It will be interesting to see, when the history of 1920-1950 comes to be written, just how much influence is put down to the cultivation of this peculiar and inverted type of snobbery. The humiliating fiasco of Munich has been ascribed to many people and things. No doubt Lord Baldwin, and a certain famous *Times* leading article, must shoulder their responsibility. But however absurd it may appear to cast him in the role of villain, it is Strube's consciously scruffy, smugly incompetent, proudly suburban creation, who symbolises for me the policy of appeasement, the sublime muddle-headedness of the signatories of the Peace Ballot, the once-fashionable attempts to prove that it was more courageous to admit to being afraid than to fight for King and Country. The shining armour of St. George may have been out of date and absurd. To replace it with the indifferently-rolled umbrella, the ill-fitting bowler-hat, the badly-trimmed moustache, the brief-case—stuffed surely with departmental forms or insurance policies—was amusing as a joke, or a jibe. As a genuine symbol of a people—and a symbol exalted as flattering at that!—it was tragic. Nor was it true. The ordinary suburban citizen did not defeat the *Luftwaffe* in a bowler hat, but in a steel helmet. And, while the bombs crashed down, he may have wondered whether St. George was quite such a mug; whether there might not be something in panoply, after all!

I hope that this may not be interpreted as criticism of the ordinary citizen, or the casting of any doubt upon his capacity for heroism in emergency. But it was not the littleness of the average man that produced his remarkable valour. It was his greatness. And to label

the great as little seems to me as absurd—as misleading and as wrong—as to call black white. The normal individual is too good for this type of class-conscious flattery. To accept it is precisely the point of view which enables mediocresly-minded film executives to talk glibly about the collective age of their audiences as being equal to that of twelve or fourteen year olds, and to produce their products in accordance with that belief. To accept it enables a newspaper of wide circulation to deny any remote possibility of the outbreak of hostilities right up to the outbreak of the Second German War without losing any sizeable proportion of its registered readers when that war began. Studied and axiomatic meekness on the part of the public can do nothing but harm to the whole entertainment business. Audiences must demand the best in no uncertain term: the best in the way of art, of performance, of professional competence, of distinction, of style. They must insist that professional critics voice such demands. They must decline to support managements and organisations which imply contempt for the public by exploiting assumed low standards of taste and judgment in the public.

I believe the theatre in particular to be in very real danger in this connection. The history of the entertainment business during the first half of the present century has been the history of its democratisation, and of its commercialisation on accepted business lines. As a result there is the present tendency on the part of plays to reflect wishful-thinking rather than life; on the part of actors to perform with one eye looking over the shoulder towards the film-studio; on the part both of films and of broadcasting to descend the steep of vulgarity lest they be accused of any yearning for the rarified heights labelled “high-brow.” The actor-manager had many faults. He chose effective plays rather than good plays. He “starred” himself unblushingly. Nor did he neglect the claims of the box-office with its pounds, shillings, and pence. But he knew the theatre and he loved the theatre—and the theatre audience. It is that knowledge, and that love, which seem essentially lacking in the contemporary commercial management, which may hitch its wagons to acknowledged “stars,” and provide dividends for ‘backers’ with a regularity unknown to the rash gamblers who put up money for Irving and Tree. But the production of plays by people who would find as great a fascination in making money out of the production of any sound commercial commodity, drains the theatre of its life-blood. The true and proper basis of the theatre is love of the theatre. There is no substitute for it.

The cases of the cinema, and of broadcasting are not quite the same. The tradition of the former has always been sternly commercial. It is indeed difficult to imagine an actor playing to a camera, a collection of technicians, and the—literally—high-up electricians, whose principal interest would seem as a rule to be divided between the

brewing of tea and consideration of the football pool, for sheer love of the work. Film-acting is most certainly a craft; a highly specialised, elaborate, and difficult craft calling for a high level of skill, accomplishment, and training. But I doubt if—at any rate as far as its acting side goes—it can ever be called art. If a “scene” can be “shot” an indefinite number of times, until the director achieves satisfaction, patience and persistence, rather than inspiration, are likely to prove its foundations. This is not to say that the film industry is entirely without members who profess and indeed have a genuine love for the cinema. But such individuals do not as a rule penetrate into the higher executive ranks. They are fortunate if they become producer-directors; more fortunate still if their enthusiasms, translated into terms of actual celluloid, can be justified in solid profits. And when such swallows happily arrive, they do not make an enduring summer. They are regarded—often with a quaint sort of pride—by the executives, as rule-proving exceptions, as amiable freaks. If they go to Hollywood they are given every possible chance—to become one with the herd. . . .

It would be astonishing therefore were the films to take the lead in raising the level of popular taste; in inducing a popular demand for criticism rather than publicity. Various encouraging signs—for example the notably high standard set by such British pictures as *The Way Ahead*, and *In Which We Serve* and the courageous flying in the face of all accepted commercial axioms with the experiment of Shakespeare's *Henry V*—show that the film-going public is quick to recognise and appreciate productions that do not seek to fool or dope it all of the time. But it is doubtful whether even now, looked at from the artistic standpoint, the talking picture can demand the serious attention won by the silent film at the climax of its achievement. “Going to the pictures” remains a phrase tinged, however slightly, with contempt; with the assumption that the film-goer ought really to be able to find something better to do. It is an assumption which the immense cinema public should take every possible step to dispel—as much for its own sake as for the sake of the industry.

But if this be true of the cinema, is it not possible and reasonable to find something of a counterweight in broadcasting? In Great Britain at any rate the influence of the microphone can be brought to bear in defence of lofty standards both of taste and execution, without qualification by the demands of the box-office, the artistic temperament, or puerile commercialism. Whatever may be the disadvantages of monopoly broadcasting, none, least of all its opponents, can deny its strength. Cannot that strength be relied upon to be used on the side of the angels?

The honest answer must, I think, be “partly.” The criticism is far too facile—and too common—that no art can flourish under the wing of



a Government Department ; that the British Broadcasting Corporation is—to all intents and purposes—such a Department, whatever label it may choose to employ ; that it has become increasingly a soulless and soul-destroying mechanism for the churning-out of routine products. But to begin with the Corporation is not in fact a Government Department, and has steadily resisted attempts to turn it into one. And, to go on with, its creative record—particularly in the musical field—can stand a good deal of examination with no need to blush for the result. As I have written elsewhere, its prestige stood remarkably high abroad. It is unlikely to stand lower as a result of its activities during the Second German War.

The B.B.C. has on occasion been rebuked for unreasonable timidity ; for kowtowing exaggeratedly to *bourgeois* standards of respectability. The charge cannot be dismissed as wholly without foundation when—for example—a production of Ibsen's *Doll's House* was banned on the ground that it might be interpreted as an attack on the basis of domestic morality ! Yet it is only fair to point out in this connection that the censorship of strong language over the air in this country is so much less rigorous than that in vogue in the United States as to cause considerable astonishment to American artists with knowledge of working conditions in both countries. In this regard the tradition was established by Sir John Reith ; partly no doubt as a result of strong personal conviction ; but partly because he saw very clearly that to base British broadcasting on anything but the trust and the affectionate goodwill of the average British home would be to build upon sand. He has, I believe, been abundantly justified, much as I may have been irked—in my specialist professional capacity—by application of the principle in various details.

But the Corporation, like the film-industry, is inclined to mistake the level at which this principle should be applied. As a rule, where it has shown courage in believing the public taste to be higher than is generally assumed, and its commonsense a wider and deeper thing, the listener has justified the belief and rallied in support. There can be no better example than the notorious case of the Dorothy Sayers cycle of religious plays. The issue was clearly a ticklish one. Religious feelings—as was shown very clearly not so long ago in the House of Commons—remain of all human feelings the most unreasoning, the most easily aroused. Every possible attempt was made by prejudice, by sensational paragraphs in the newspapers, even by advertisement, to damn the project in the eyes of the public. A headline went so far as to proclaim Broadcasting House “ A Temple of Blasphemy.” Yet, when the Corporation stuck to its guns and produced the plays, their reception—in spite of the fact that the publicity must have swelled their audience by large numbers of casual persons listening on grounds quite other than those of interest or piety—provided an unchallengeable

response to the outcry of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and the gnashing of Mr. Martin's teeth.

So long as the B.B.C. is not false to standards of taste and execution which it knows to be good, it need not fear for popular support. To lower such standards consciously is to insult the listener, and simultaneously to earn his contempt. To "play down" is fatal. It is therefore vital for watch continually to be kept against the possibility of increasing timidity, of establishment of falsely low standards.

The second lion in the broadcasting path is complacency. Here again the evil is negative rather than positive. It arises not from deliberate laziness, but inevitably from the remorseless processes of an organisation whose work is never done. For theatrical manager or film producer there can always be a period of respite; the quiet of passion spent; the leisure hours in which success or failure can be appraised, and plans for a reasonably distant future laid. But broadcasting goes on all the time. Nor can its planning and its practice rest with the same hands. The result cannot help but be a tendency at times to choose the easier of two decisions; to avoid the complications of trouble; to keep grit out of the machinery for everybody's sake; to pursue the path of the programme-item proved successful, rather than to risk the perils implied in originality, and the search for the new thing.

But here also the public must in the long run prove the decisive factor. If the listener clings to his natural conservatism, and leaves criticism of complacency to cranks and exhibitionists, then he is bound ultimately to get the broadcasting he deserves. For the second-rate both in broadcasting and cinema the average individual is far too good. For Strube's Little Man the second-rate is perfectly adequate, for he would appreciate nothing better. The average individual must dispose once and for all of this degrading identification. The leaders of the entertainment industry must help him to do so by offering him their best work. He must help them by making the effort necessary to appreciate that work.

## CHAPTER XI

### AN INNOCENT ABROAD—2. SWEDEN, GERMANY, HUNGARY

I HAVE cause to be grateful to the B.B.C. for many things. For none do I feel more gratitude than the several opportunities which I was given to travel abroad on the Corporation's business. Foreign travel has always appealed to me enormously, ever since at the age of ten I was introduced to the delights of a day-trip to Boulogne. I fear that I have always neglected the admonition to "see your own country first."

I never see the white cliffs of Dover, and the green fields of Kent, on returning from a trip abroad without a queer sensation compounded of affection, admiration—even of relief. But—maybe because I have always lived in London—the English countryside, the English hotel, and the conditions of the average English holiday, seem in my eyes to lack both charm and appeal.

My annual leaves were therefore almost invariably given up to the enjoyment, on the modest scale of a slender purse, of sunshine, bathing, and unfamiliar food, in such places as the unfashionable parts of the Riviera, and the smaller villages of the Italian Lakes. In such an environment—somewhat to the astonishment, and occasionally, to the exasperation, of colleagues who could not understand my failure to appreciate the rival attractions of golf—I found it the most agreeable form of relaxation to indulge in the writing of sensational fiction. As I became more and more inured to the regular routine of desk and studio, I found that it became more and more difficult, when on holiday, simply to laze. The fine art of the enjoyment of absolute leisure defeated me. It was necessary to adopt another form of activity as a change from one's normal occupation. . . .

It has been said that foreign travel broadens the mind ; also that it tends to promote international understanding. Conversely I have heard it maintained that the latter is humbug : that the more you see of foreigners the less you are bound to like them ! Nor was the upholder of the cynical view an American Isolationist from the Middle West. For myself I can only say that I find the experience of travelling—so long as it does not merely consist in moving from one *de luxe* hotel to another—interesting and pleasant ; and that, with the exceptions of Hollywood and Berlin, I have never been anywhere abroad without wishing one day to go back there again.

But these annual summer leaves tended to be regrettably static. After the conventional relaxation of two or three days in Paris—where I was so fortunate as to have a home from home in my brother Lewis's hospitable flat—I have inclined to establish myself for three weeks in some small villa or inexpensive *pension*, where I could settle down into a completely new routine of eating, writing, and sleeping against a strange background which I rejoiced to find rapidly becoming familiar. In such holidays there was little likelihood of or opportunity for going far afield, or for covering much in the way of ground.

However on four separate occasions the B.B.C. remembered its former motto—Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation—in connection with my unworthy self, and sent me abroad to contribute a mite towards international understanding by adding to international comprehension of broadcasting methods. In the summer of 1931 I was despatched to Germany ; in the autumn of 1933 to Sweden ; in 1936 to Hungary ; and in the early spring of 1938 to Hollywood and New York.

Of the Swedish trip there is little to record—except that it was in many ways the most pleasant of the lot. Though regrettably short—only a fortnight—I was most fortunate in the weather, which was superb, so that I saw the most lovely capital in all Europe at its glittering best. I realised something of the prestige which the Corporation, justly or unjustly, had achieved abroad, when on his first night in Stockholm its representative found his bedroom invaded by excitable reporters at midnight, and his extremely hazy first impressions of Sweden splashed with flattering prominence across the morning newspapers. I enjoyed food more than ever before—or since for that matter—in my life. I saw the famous private Royal Theatre at Drottningholm, most exquisite and satisfying of eighteenth century survivals. The only disagreeable memory I can recall in connection with the Swedish trip was the occasion when, at the close of a luncheon in my honour which had started a little after noon and ended not much short of four o'clock, I found myself expected to make a speech of thanks *in French*. I can only hope that I may have left behind me a better impression as a dramatic producer than I did as a linguist. . . .

My official host was Doctor Carl Dymling, whose position in the Swedish broadcasting hierarchy seemed to correspond more closely to that of Director of Talks than to my own. Radio drama indeed in Sweden was part of the responsibility of a department dealing generally with the Spoken Word. He was vastly hospitable, vigorously enthusiastic. It was a little humiliating to find that Sweden at that time broadcast exactly twice as many plays yearly as did Great Britain—and this in spite of the fact that Dr. Dymling had no staff of specialist radio-dramatic producers, and shared my own difficulty in persuading native-born dramatists to write for the microphone. He met, and apparently overcame, these handicaps by the regular adoption to broadcasting of stage producers from the various Stockholm theatres, and by translating and adapting foreign plays of all kinds—including, I am glad to say, many English plays. One of these plays, of which I brought a copy back to this country for publication, had started life as an Italian farce. The Italian was translated into German, the German version into Swedish, the Swedish into English. And oddly successful in the event it proved! I took a number of plays suggested to me as interesting by Dr. Dymling, with me when I returned to England. The Corporation was promptly assailed for favouring the work of foreigners at the expense of native playwrights. . . .

My interest in such studio work as I saw in progress could not but be sensibly diminished by my complete ignorance of the Swedish language. Since 1933, however, I have been authoritatively informed that it is perfectly possible to produce a play for broadcasting with the producer in almost entire ignorance of the language in which it is written. I remain sceptical. But such productions are, I understand,

accomplished facts, which must be allowed to speak for themselves. It was, however, obvious that in Stockholm the broadcasting of plays was taken very seriously indeed ; and that their production technique ; was both simple and sensible, stage actors adapting themselves to microphone conditions entirely as a matter of course.

I confess that I do not remember very much of this particular mission, and I doubt if it added appreciably to my broadcasting experience. But I would not have missed for the world the faded upholsteries of the Royal Theatre, the little cards of identity still fixed to the backs of the seats to place the various members of the Court ; nor the sunshine glittering on the water through the arches of the colonnade beside the great tower of the Town Hall, that modern wonder of an apparently civilised world. . . .

The German trip had been quite a different kind of story. It took place at a time when the Weimar Republic was undergoing one of its periodical agonies. The famous closing of the Credit-Anstalt, indeed, took place on the day when I arrived in Berlin. And the interest of the journey was, for me, as much in the political situation as in the state of German broadcasting. I quote from my diary :

*July 12th.*—I write this in the Dom Hotel at Cologne, where I arrived with Archie (*E. A. Harding, my companion on the trip, who fortunately spoke German*) to-day via Harwich and the Hook. Saw Dick Addinsell on the train. A brief glimpse of Holland left two impressions : of the incredible cleanliness of the streets, and of the singular mathematical precision according to which it appeared that their wireless aerials had been strung. It is stiflingly hot, and the huge shadow of the cathedral seems to brood over us with a sense of melodramatic menace—perhaps appropriate to the situation. The town strikes one as grey, and the people as plain. A pleasant German in the hotel spoke of Leningrad where he had recently been. He said that the only new things he had seen in Russia were three war-ships at Kronstadt ! It should be interesting to get the local reaction to the latest French move. . . .

*July 13th.*—Woke much refreshed after ten hours' solid sleep. In the morning to the Westdeutsche Rundfunk in the Dagobertstrasse. Hardt is away, and one Kraege looked after us. The first novelty was the lift, which works like a non-stop staircase, with compartments spaced so that one can enter and leave while in motion—safely, yet with just that spice of risk so flattering to the manlier virtues ! I entered nervously. I left a little inflated with myself. The local staff refer to it as "the Rosary." . . . Rather luckily found a rehearsal of Hermann Kesser's play *Strassenmann* in progress. Here the producer is not blessed with the dignified seclusion of our Dramatic Control Room. He directs the storm from a control-room adjoining the studio, with an engineer at the knobs

of a four-way "mixer." Through two glass windows he can see his cast wherever they may be dispersed about his one large studio. He can—and does—encourage their efforts by gesture as well as by microphone "talk-back"; and he can—and does—frequently burst out of his control-room to interrupt, to criticise, and to demonstrate. This constant and vigorous personal touch, combined with white drill-coats, plus-fours, and horn-rimmed spectacles to produce an effect reminiscent of film direction. The effect on the cast seemed at times almost electrifying. But though from this point of view the system has its advantages, I feel that our more impersonal method which, except in early rehearsals, separates producer from players, gives the former more opportunity to achieve both unity and perspective, and discourages the latter from overacting. . . .

This lack of perspective—sound-perspective—is accentuated here in Cologne by the limits of accommodation, which make multiple-studio methods out of the question. In more elaborate productions, such as *Strassenmann*, the difficulty is to some extent overcome by the curtaining off of one microphone for the Narrator, and by the placing of the orchestra in an adjacent passage, where it is kept in touch with the producer by a studio-manager wearing headphones. Cologne has no artificial-echo room. For variation in sound resonance the producer can have curtains drawn along his studio-walls, which are themselves composed in sections of varying fabrics, including one of marble. There is no special "effects" studio. Effects are all hand-manipulated on the spot. Kraege commented that of English programmes Sieveking's *Pursuit of Pleasure* had been much admired, and that he had learned from our programmes that all his items tended to be too long. . . .

Still very hot in a stuffy way. After lunch saw an excellent Pommer film *The Man in Search of His Own Murderer*; the best I've seen since *Le Million* to which I judge it owes a good deal. In the evening to a music-hall, "The Red Mill," very hot and very cheap, and saw some quite good turns through an almost solid haze of tobacco smoke, beer, and sweat de Cologne. . . . There is a shortage of American currency here, which may be a grim sign.

*July 15th.*—In the Kolnstadt Hotel, Berlin. Arrived early this morning after a good night journey, to find the streets very empty, and a curious tense feeling in the air. I do not much fancy the Berlin taxi-driver's habit of taking all his corners on the skid at top speed. Our last night in Cologne we heard an interesting unscripted Radio Discussion by five special *sports-rapporteurs*, and drank and talked with them after. The discussion was immensely vital, and, I should judge, efficiently done; but in type they gave the impression of not awfully first-rate journalists. Probst of Cologne obviously meant well, but lacked manners—as indeed all were inclined to do. I

gathered they are much upset because we don't give German announcements in guest-programmes. This should, I feel, be changed.

This hotel is not high-class, but seems adequate save for a dubious lavatory. Out to the new Rundfunkhaus in the Masurenallee, and after much trouble got to Flesch—Programme Controller—and Pfeil, his assistant, who made no secret of being a Nazi, and like so many Nazis is a fine physical type. He is incidentally an Alpinist of some repute.

The Rundfunkhaus is typical of the city it has been built to serve. Like Berlin, it sprawls, and is pretty hideous—but effective. It has only four storeys, but its ground-plan must be vast. It stands in the shape of a bow, the arc at the back. There is a central court—playfully termed “the Penitentiary” by certain of the inhabitants familiar with American prisons from their experience of films. There is a glazed tiling frontage of a dark purple, which is sufficiently hideous, but one walks into a great well of a central hall, very airy and bright, with red linoleum flooring, bright yellow balustrades, and much modern metal-work that looked like a faintly-yellowed aluminium.

But with all this space the studio accommodation is not comparable with that planned for Broadcasting House. Even including special gramophone studios the number does not run into double figures. As at Cologne the multiple-studio system does not function. The equivalent is aimed at by the partitioning of a large studio, by curtaining off individual microphones, and by varied treatment of segments of studio walls. However, when we meet Bischoff, the new Programme Controller at Breslau, we shall have a chance to study the methods of the German protagonist of our own system. . . .

Flesch gave us a superb lunch at Horcher's—the first tolerable food I have had in Germany—and proved delightful both as a host and as a personality: quick, humorous, intelligent, and keen. Saw rather a dim film in the evening, and after essaying the underground with success, home to an early bed.

*July 16th.*—The banks here have re-opened, but under all sorts of limiting conditions, and I should judge the general situation to be worse than yesterday. Ramsay Macdonald has cancelled his flight here, and the resulting impression is bad. People seem to think that the French have England in their pocket—which is not agreeable. Spent most of the morning with Pfeil at the Rundfunkhaus, hearing various recordings played over: Effects, Celebrities, a Monthly Political Review programme—a good notion indifferently handled—and a complete production of *S.O.S.*, which was capital and most interesting. (*This was a radio play about the rescue of the Italian Nobile expedition by the Soviet icebreaker Krassin,*

which was banned on the English air as the result of a debate in the House of Lords!) After lunch with Pfeil out to Neubabelsburg to see Erik Charell at work in the UFA film studios on *The Congress Dances*. We saw in rehearsal the scene of a gala operatic performance before the Emperor Alexander: a vast "set" to hold at least five hundred actors in costume, a ballet on a full-sized stage, and a big orchestra. Nine microphones, and no less than thirteen cameras in simultaneous operation. An astonishing exhibition of efficiency and taking of pains over tiny detail. One was left with a kaleidoscope of mingled momentary impressions: Charell in a white motoring cap, worn peak to rear, among the white-uniformed Viennese musicians; Conrad Veidt in a blue dressing-gown and an immense eye-glass; Willy Fritsch asleep in a chair; a young assistant-director in a green shirt and plus fours among the ballet-dancers; a camera neatly concealed beneath the conductor's chair, and operated by remote control; the vivid blue blaze as the lights went up. Only the music of *Prince Igor* seemed out of place and period in a film of 1815.

Back to Berlin by car. The number of beggars, and still more of those who look consistently underfed, is really appalling. One feels a people in the grip of a slowly creeping paralysis of both hope and effort. But it is interesting to see an actual example in being of the new effect of radio upon modern life in an emergency. During all this week the programmes of the Berlin station have been chopped and changed continuously to enable responsible speakers to come to the microphone and put their fingers on the pulse of public *morale*. The experience of our own General Strike is confirmed. Broadcasting is now as indispensable a factor of community organisation as railways, telegraphs or telephones . . .

Dined ill in the equivalent of a Corner House in the Friedrich-strasse. Prudes who complain of conditions in Piccadilly or Burlington Gardens should pay this Berlin thoroughfare a visit. Never have I seen so many ladies of the pavement, nor suffered such importunities . . .

July 19th.—Spent the morning in the Funkhaus, and lunched Flesch and Pfeil well if expensively at the Bristol, after which Pfeil took us out to see the Tempelhof airfield, which was impressive and fascinating with shapes of things to come. In the evening with Archie to the Deutsches Theater to see *Der Hauptmann von Köpenik*. Knowing the original story I was glad to find that I could follow enough of the dialogue to enjoy some first class acting and production. Some talk in a café on the Kurfürsten'dam over rather indifferent brandy. A. then went off to dance. I did not feel my ignorance of German would carry that hurdle, so walked home, turning aside on the way to contemplate with fascinated horror the marble margraves,



counts, and emperors lining the Sieges Allee. They looked livid and ghastly under pale-blue floodlighting—this when the rest of the city is in semi-darkness. One could well believe the odd paragraph in Badeker, which warns one that the remoter parts of the Tiergarten should be avoided late at night.

*July 20th.*—Weather still bad and changeable. The situation in Berlin calm, but increasingly apprehensive. Heard from Constable *Imperial Treasure* (my *third novel*) has gone into a second edition, which is gratifying. Lunched with Flesch, Bender his musical director, and Bischoff from Breslau. I can't get to like German food: too much of it, messily served, and monotonous. Bischoff promises well for next week. To-day we leave for Breslau, and, interesting though it has been personally I have had enough of Berlin. As a city it lacks character. As an atmosphere and background it is unsettled and miserable . . . Finally, for all his cordiality, I did not really take to Pfeil. We saw too much of him, and too little of Flesch. But I got the impression that the former was almost as much an official escort as a host—and that the latter's position was inclined to be shaky . . .

*July 21st.*—Savoy Hotel, Breslau. A tolerable journey, but a bad lunch on the train. After the atmosphere and sprawled modernity and bad taste of Berlin, Breslau seems astonishingly tranquil, with the tranquility of a town with a genuine, historical tradition. One was irresistibly reminded of Oxford watching the mellow evening light on the twelfth century buildings from the bridge over the Oder. Presumably owing to Bischoff's good offices, the Radio people here are being more than civil, putting a car at our disposal, and being helpful in every possible way. Unfortunately Bischoff himself, evidently the liveliest of wires, has no English. But his administrative opposite number, a tough middle-aged Berliner called Hadert—whom I suspect of being Nazi in sympathy if not in fact—speaks pretty good American.

Lunched rather interminably at the Metropole-Monopole, and after watched the rehearsing of a radio play dealing with circus life in which I feel John Watt might be interested—under the not very impressive direction of a red-haired Austrian theatre-producer who reminded me much of Peter Cresswell. Bischoff's radio-dramatic work has got him his new *Intendant's* job—but it will be a pity if it takes him away from all studio work. His new man clearly has no notion of radio technique. He was continually leaving his "mixer" to grimace at and encourage his actors through the glass panel of his listening-room, attempting to substitute his own personality for the meticulous, and, in some ways, necessarily mechanical preparation and rehearsal which are essential to good microphone work. Besides, after seeing it in practice both in Berlin and Cologne,

I am finally convinced that the method is bad for the actors. One or two explained to me that they like being thus "conducted." One added that he liked it because it convinced him that at least one person was actually listening! But just as the producer is liable to be distracted from the control of the rhythm of the play, and to be agonised by trivial mistakes, so the actor, who should be watching his light-cues, studying his position *vis à vis* the microphone, and reacting to his colleagues' efforts, tends to gaze with fixed anxiety at the producer's glass panel, and to rely upon the producer's gestures, rather than on a technique acquired by intelligence and experience of proper rehearsal. Bischoff's multiple-studio lay-out is very much a lash-up affair, consisting of only three studios, one of which is tiny, and two of which are visible from the listening-room—in my view a mistake. But he is immensely intelligent and go-ahead, gaining from the fact that, unlike Cologne, the Breslau station was built *for broadcasting*, and that he himself is only thirty-two . . .

Heard a *Midsummernacht* programme, of music and poetry—much of the latter Bischoff's own; the equivalent of one of our Literary Feature-programmes. Of course I could not judge its merits, but B. was handling his own "mixer" and showed that he knew all about it.

In the afternoon we were taken about Breslau by car: the cathedral, the famous church built in two storeys—in the lower of which the troopers of Gustavus Adolphus are said to have stabled their horses in the Thirty Years War—the stadium, experimental modern buildings, and so on. All most interesting. Whatever the Germans may or may not have done since 1918, they have certainly not been idle. A copy of Monday's *Times* made gloomy reading, and I begin to wonder whether I am wise to go on into Poland. But they seem convinced here that no one really wants to start a genuine upheaval. . . Dined with Hadert *en famille*.

*July 22nd.*—Spent most of the morning listening to records of various specially-made sound effects, in which Bischoff is an expert, and of which he is justifiably proud. War-noises for his production of *Brigade Exchange* (*Johansen's war-play produced at Savoy Hill with great success during 1930*) were, I regret to have to admit, far superior to ours.

Out later by car with Hadert to the Riesengebirge, and spent a lovely day in superb scenery going right over to the Czech frontier. But what a plain people the Germans are! We motored about 350 kilometres, and got back about seven in the evening, to go on to Bischoff's house at half-past eight for a radio party. This was quite fun in spite of the language difficulty, and the queerest order of drinks: white wine, cognac, much beer, more cognac, and finally

in the small hours claret. Much talk after with Archie, and to bed about four in the morning. A long and exhausting day.

*July 23rd.*—Woke only just in time to bid Archie farewell. He goes back westward. I to Cracow first, and then to Zakopane to stay with my Axcenowicz cousins. Spent most of the morning with Hadert. I did not really take to him for all his cordiality. It is difficult to be certain about it—especially as in Berlin one did not see anyone superior to Flesch in the German broadcasting hierarchy—but I felt that in Flesch-Pfeil and Bischoff-Hadert there was sufficient evidence of the beginning of an odd dual control system: each "artist" as it were being teamed with an administrator of a much tougher—and as a rule older—type.

My other prevailing impression, largely confirmed here in Breslau, is of the abiding hatred of the Germans for the French. Tact may have tempered the expression of their attitude *vis à vis* the British. But while they seemed to regard the Poles with little more than contempt, they never spoke of the French without reference to a future reckoning. For the most part this emotional loathing seems based on memories of the occupation of the Rhineland by black troops. Whatever the truth of German allegations—and it was odd to find them more spectacular in Silesia than in Cologne—there can be no doubt of the feeling: bitter, lasting, and revengeful . . .

I spent much of the journey from Breslau to Cracow in converse with a French *commis-voyageur*, who was amiable personally, though most belligerent politically. It was interesting at this moment to get a French point of view. Clearly the whole situation is pretty bad: the French think the Germans are simply bluffing: the Germans that the French intend frankly to ruin them at any cost. Probably neither is the whole truth by a long chalk. But the usual platitudinous expressions of good-will emerging from London neither solve the problem nor endear us to the principal contestants.

Considering the usual belief that all Polish soldiers dress on every possible and impossible occasion like Ruritanian hussars, it was amusing to find old General Zaba awaiting me outside the Francuzki Hotel in Cracow, wearing a battered straw hat and blue plus-fours! I had met him in London, and my aunt had written to him on my behalf. He showed me most of a lovely city, and gave me dinner in his flat: the Polish food a great relief after Germany. I was much touched when he announced his intention of seeing me on to the train for the mountains in the morning at a quite indecently early hour . . .

My leave during the late summer of 1936 had been spent most agreeably on the Dalmatian coast—for the most part on the island of Korcula. The beds were hard; the scenery was rocky; the local

inhabitants were tough ; the wine, of a queer blood-orange colour, was harsh ; the Italian captain of the boat which took me back from Dubrovnik to Trieste, wore a singlet and trousers, was an amateur of the saxophone, and spent most of his time on his bridge playing with a long-haired dachshund ! Scenes and sequences alike had proved distinctly out of the common run, and proportionately pleasant. It was, therefore, a jerk back into reality more than normally violent when I found in Paris, in the course of my journey back, a wire from Eric Maschwitz bidding me await his arrival in the French capital. A following letter told me that he had brought off a pet project of his own, with which I was familiar. The Corporation was sending him to Budapest to make a programme experiment : to give a broadcasting impression of night-life in the Hungarian capital in four programmes during a single week—to be exact the week of September 22nd—28th. As not only a good deal of organisation was required, but also the writing of four scripts, and certain other personal appearances at the microphone, I had been chosen to join the party. Frances Clare, the actress, came with us to add decorative quality to the expedition, while the Hungarian Radio provided guides, philosophers, friends, and interpreters in the persons of Rupert Gosling, and Zita Gordon—well-known in Hungary as a film actress, and, not so very long afterwards, to become my sister-in-law.

Certain radio-critics adopted a curiously hostile attitude to the expedition. While the more responsible of them were prepared to give a certain amount of credit to a novel idea, and to show curiosity as to its outcome, there were not lacking several—including, I regret to say, two or three ex-members of the staff of the B.B.C.—to denounce us as unregenerate “playboys,” and to see in the whole business merely an elaborate conspiracy by Maschwitz and myself to secure personal publicity and have a good time. I should have been grateful for their company during the greater part of the trip, for I wonder if any of them would have stayed the course. Budapest is—or was—a delightful and lovely city in which to spend a holiday. But we were not spending a holiday. And, *pace* the critics aforesaid, the programmes that were billed under the comprehensive title *Night falls in Budapest*, implied very much more than visiting one night-club after another. I do not wish to be misunderstood. The night-clubs were visited. They had to be. The Hungarians made it abundantly clear that business was to be combined with pleasure. We had just twelve days in which to make our necessary personal contacts, solve the considerable technical problems, and get the programmes on the air. And one of the results was that the scripts had for the most part to be written between the smaller hours of the morning and breakfast-time. There was no other time in which writing could be done. We found it invariably the custom that no Hungarian dreamed of keeping any

appointment less than twenty minutes late. We also found that the first half-hour of any such appointment must be spent in personal courtesies, and a discussion of the iniquities inflicted upon Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon.



(Pintér Jeno rajza)

A Cartoon from a Budapest newspaper, to illustrate one of the problems arising out of "Night Falls in Budapest."

Eric Maschwitz endured all without flinching. Indeed, I fancy he has seldom in his life enjoyed himself more. Interviews with everybody from dance-band leaders and actresses to Dohnanyi and the Archbishop; rehearsing; good-will parties; a flight over the city in a thirteen-year-old aeroplane on a day of low cloud and driving rain; wine-tasting after a visit to the Budafok cellars on a boiling hot afternoon; personal appearances at the microphone, including one while being plastered with thermal mud—nothing quelled him. He was hardly checked in his stride when, in springing out of a car in the course of one of his wilder dashes across the city from one microphone point to

another, he cut his head severely, and carried on while relays of handkerchiefs were commandeered from all and sundry to staunch the flow of blood! The very warmth of our reception became an embarrassment. The Hungarian Press decided that we were news in the biggest possible way. As a result we found ourselves the centre of a crowd wherever we went. Broadcasting from the outside of a café is not made easier by a swarm of sightseers eight or ten deep milling about one at a range of six feet or so; nor from the inside of a restaurant, when a photographer in his enthusiasm puts up a large tripod between the table with the microphone and the engineer in a far corner, and then, when a vital cue is expected, smothers everything with a flash-light and its consequent cloud of smoke; nor from a square, chosen as a microphone-point for its picturesque peace and quiet, when you find a crowd of two or three hundred people assembled in it to see the fun and "the wheels go round. . ."

I fear that, while Maschwitz remained undaunted, and Frances Clare soothed her nerves by the purchase of a new hat, I came to look upon the scene with an eye that grew progressively more jaundiced. In a way I had the stickier end of the business, for I was supposed to be responsible for the "production." At Broadcasting House, with a dramatic-control panel at my disposal for "mixing" the intakes from the various microphone-points—theatre, café, table-tennis club, villa of distinguished musician, garrison church, night-club, wine-cellars, city battlements, to mention a few representative examples—and a staff of experienced Outside Broadcasting engineers, the task would have been a little complex but by no means extraordinary. To the staff of Hungarian Radio we were suggesting and demanding the unprecedented and the impossible. The Chief Engineer—never known to any of us otherwise than as "the Chief"—spent most of the first three days like the Eldest Oyster in shaking a heavy head. It was not that he was appalled. He was simply incredulous that the thing could be done. And considering that he had a staff of eight to do what in England would have called for about thirty people, his attitude could not be considered unreasonable. I found also that the mixing and controlling of the programmes themselves had to be carried out from the Engineers' Control Room in the Hungarian Radio headquarters. In this room—floored for some inscrutable reason with echoing parquet—I sat, one ear glued to a telephone line to London. Into the other blared the normal local programme from an adjacent loud-speaker. While before my eyes, bulging and heavy-lidded from too little sleep, the Chief and his principal assistant effected the necessary "cross-fades" by sliding plugs in and out with the dexterity of professional conjurors, while the bright green cords seemed about to take on at any moment the aspect and deadly attributes of the serpents of Laocöon.

There were, of course, compensations. It was a new experience to be driven at speed in an official motor-car, with a flag flying on the bonnet, and motor-cyclist outriders clearing the way. Just for a moment one felt it might be fun to be a dictator after all! It was strange and rather exciting to be caricatured in the newspapers, and become a central figure in an anti-semitic "incident," when a Jewish-owned dance band declined to take part in one of the programmes. It made one feel important to be told so often and so emphatically that one was contributing to an improvement in Anglo-Hungarian relations. And, for a short period, working against time and "off the cuff" could not fail to be exhilarating, especially in such surroundings. But speaking for myself, the time came when I felt that I could not face one more glass of *barack*, listen to one more *tzigane* orchestra, nor conceal from one more patriotic Magyar my profound ignorance of the details of the Treaty of Trianon. I was not exactly encouraged to be told, after the broadcast of the second programme of the four, that the Czechs, regarding the whole affair as a diabolical piece of pro-Hungarian propaganda, had interfered with the land-line carrying the programme through Prague, and most successfully ruined the transmission.

It was therefore in a mood of rather weary disillusion that I approached the final programme on the Saturday night. It was an elaborate affair, which had called for elaborate planning from the point of view of "movement." It began in old Buda, where up on the battlements Eric Maschwitz discoursed on their historic past to the accompaniment of the choir of the Garrison Church. (It proved impossible, incidentally, to persuade that choir that we only needed them to sing for a couple of minutes or so. They persisted in giving us full measure, and in the event had to be left in full song, when Maschwitz left for his next microphone-point). While he was on his way by car down the steep hill and through the narrow winding streets to Pest across the river, where he was to have his mud-bath, I kept the ball rolling by an impromptu description of the pavements of Pest on a Saturday night as seen from the outside of a fashionable café. Maschwitz, not without justification, had little confidence in my ability to keep going indefinitely. And of course it was necessary for me to keep talking—against an ever-increasing and more-curious crowd—until I got the welcome cue that he had arrived at the bath. He therefore undressed in the car; leaped out, clad picturesquely in his underclothes; hurled *pengoes* at the chauffeur; and ran along the bare passage towards the mud-bath, shedding what remained of his garment on the way. At the end of the passage were swing doors. Through these he hurled himself, and with a movement almost simultaneous flung himself upon the mackintosh-sheeting prepared to receive the mud-pack. Only then did his eyes light upon the gallery overlooking the bath. Only then did he realise that quite a few of the fashionable ladies of Buda-

pest had come to witness this most original of Outside Broadcasts—and to get rather more than they had bargained for. . . .

The evening ended in an orgy of broken glass following the drinking of an inordinate number of healths; in speech-making; and in amateurish attempts to dance the *czardas*, in the Kis Royal restaurant, whose normal *clientèle* must have thought that they had blundered unawares into a good imitation of a madhouse. It is perhaps as well that a semi-permanent record of the proceedings, in the shape of a news-reel, perished together with various more important things when my office in Scott's Hotel went up in the smoke of the 1941 *blitz*. . . . It was probably the one part of the Hungarian trip which might have been held by the uncharitable to have justified the critics.

Apart from its more exhausting, its picturesque and its frivolous aspects, there were two conclusions to be drawn from the Budapest expedition. The first arose from the obvious and astonishing prestige enjoyed by the B.B.C. in Hungary, not only among those connected with Hungarian Radio but among all those with whom we made contact. And in this connection it may be relevant to mention that we made no fewer than sixty personal contacts of reasonable importance within the first few days of our visit. Not only were the programmes and organisation of the B.B.C. regarded with admiration, but the Corporation seemed to be placed in a position almost analogous to that of the *Times*—semi-officially representative of the British point of view, even of the British governmental point of view. Its hypothetical influence was proportionately great, if a little alarming. Its responsibility was great also. That the proper conclusions were drawn from evidence of this kind can, I think fairly, be claimed now that the activities of the Corporation's European Service during the Second German War can be studied. The necessary foundations for the success of that service—in particular a reputation for integrity and truth—had been well laid on the continent. And for this, too, a primary share of the credit must surely go to Lord Reith.

The second conclusion was the confirmation of an impression already received in Stockholm and in Breslau: of the very real *camaraderie* and mutual sympathy that immediately prevailed between professional broadcasters regardless of nationality. My relations with Dr. Dymling and Herr Bischoff had been more than pleasant, but they had also been principally those of guest and hosts. In Budapest I had the experience—to be repeated later in New York—of actually working with the staff of a foreign radio organisation. The organisation was strange. The methods were different. The language difficulty was always with us. But I found that we came together over difficulties and problems that remained constant in connection with all microphone work everywhere; and I realised that professional "shop" shared is far the quickest road to international understanding and amity.



The battles in Budapest between Maschwitz and myself on the one hand and "The Chief" on the other, were precisely the same as those which we fought with our own Engineering Division at home. They were lively. They produced results. And we ended excellent friends, by so much the wiser.

It has sometimes been observed with pain and surprise by certain organs of left-wing opinion that professional soldiers—for example—are liable to mutual understanding, even to mutual admiration, though they may be on opposite sides. Is it altogether fantastic to see cause for hope rather than dismay in symptoms of such professional internationalism? The tourist, and in particular I regret to say the British or American tourist, is not likely as a rule to contribute to goodwill between nations. His aims being mere sightseeing or enjoyment he tends to look upon the native inhabitants as part of the scenery—even as lower animals. I was once driven in a motor-car across most of Central Europe by an American, by nature a most agreeable, amiable and hospitable man, who did little but complain because Hungarians, Austrians, Italians, Swiss, and French neither spoke English, nor constructed their roads primarily for the convenience of American-sized touring cars. And it is still remembered in Paris how Anglo-Saxon visitors would plaster their luggage with notes of high denomination during the flight from the *franc*. Such examples of bad manners and stupidity are not wiped out by lavish spending, nor even by normally decent behaviour on the part of the great body of tourists. For the tourist, being essentially the amateur, only scrapes the surface of the visited country. It is in the bringing together of professionals of every type of craft, in the struggle and comradeship of working together, that nationalist awkwardnesses, differences, and difficulties are forgotten; for forgotten and laid aside they must be, simply for the sake of the work.

## CHAPTER XII

### ROUND AND ABOUT THE CINEMA

BEFORE dealing with this extremely controversial subject I feel that I must make one thing quite clear. I am not a highbrow. By which I mean that I am not a member of the self-conscious *intelligentsia*. The highbrow label has, on occasions, been affixed to my coat-tails by some of my colleagues, in circumstances of exasperation both pardonable and easily comprehensible. It is true that I like Russian plays; that I prefer ballet and revue to music halls and musical comedy; that I consider a classical and historical education superior to one based upon science and chemistry; and that I am regrettably allergic

to the extremely successful stage pieces of Miss Dodie Smith and Miss Esther McCracken. But as far as films are concerned my tastes are essentially catholic. I like the Brothers Marx. I like Walt Disney. I like Miss Ginger Rogers and Miss Rita Hayworth. I like the work of Ernst Lubitsch. I liked the "silents" of Fritz Lang. I liked *Potemkin*. I liked *Qrai des Brumes*. I liked *Scarface* and *Stage-Coach*. I liked *Ninotchka*. I liked *The Road to Frisco* and *Under the Clock* and *The Congress Dances*. I like Garbo and Judy Garland, and Walter Pidgeon, and Charles Coburn, and Gene Tierney, and Charles Boyer, and Danièle Darrieux, and Michele Morgan, and Ann Sheridan, and Nazimova. I like most—but not all—French films. Most of all I like going to the cinema. Indeed, if put into a corner over it, I would confess that by and large I prefer going to the cinema to going to the theatre. I find, as a rule, that I get more fun out of it. So the opinions which follow should be read, not as those of a highbrow or a specialist, but as those of an ordinary filmgoer, who, owing to various freakish circumstances, has had occasional opportunities, not available to most ordinary film-goers, to go behind the celluloid.

My first personal experience of films occurred while I was playing in *The Ringer*. Henry Forbes, whom I was understudying, had a part in a silent picture—an adaptation of the old military melodrama *One of the Best*. The play may, I feel, without injustice be considered to have been based upon a rather hazy conception of the Dreyfus Case, infinitely simplified, and transferred to an English setting. In any case, the great scene was the public degradation of the hero before his regiment drawn up in square, including the ripping off of his epaulettes and decorations, and the breaking of his sword. Forbes was nice enough to suggest to the director that as he was playing one of the two officers escorting the hero on this solemn occasion, I might play the other. I found myself accordingly in barracks at Hounslow, in the oddly assorted company of Walter Byron, James Carew, Harold Huth, and two hundred or so lately joined recruits of the Middlesex Regiment—loaned by the War Office, and very self-conscious in uniforms of period approximately 1830.

Hayes Hunter, who directed, was an American. He was by nature of a most agreeable and kindly disposition. But you would have found difficulty in believing it, had you seen—and heard—him in action. (These were the days when a director's prestige seemed largely to be measured in terms of megaphone power). The weather proved that generally associated in this country with "location" work: a steady drizzle combined with a chilly wind. And my first few days of film-work consisted of sitting gloomily on an army camp-bed, failing to read, and occasionally playing *vingt-et-un*. However, at last a day, fitfully sunlit, put in an appearance. The Middlesex recruits were

mustered on the square. Henry Forbes, one or two other small-part actors and I took up our places with some diffidence, and—as far as I was concerned at any rate—considerable discomfort in uniform. And, megaphone in hand, Hayes Hunter—supported by a War Office expert, who was to supervise accoutrements and military evolutions—took his stand below a sort of scaffolding on which the camera had been erected.

Nowadays film-directing seems to me a far more civilised proceeding than it was then. The megaphone has been relegated to the museum, together with large-check caps and Wardour-Street-cut riding breeches. But in the days of the "silents" there were no microphones, no supercilious-eyed sound experts to exercise a restraining influence. I don't know whether, for his tender or passionate scenes, Hayes Hunter made use, on the studio floor, of a small musical combination to get his actors into the proper atmospheric mood. I have seen the method employed, and I fear, found it irresistibly comic. But "on location" Hayes provided his atmosphere himself. I sympathised more than a little with Walter Byron, who was playing the much-wronged hero. He had to stand, rigid and impassive, with the poker-face deemed appropriate to an English officer, while Harold Huth tore the medals from his breast and broke his sword before his eyes. But behind that mask, Hayes decided, there must "register" unspeakable depths of mental anguish. And Byron had to face not merely Huth and the camera, but also the convulsed features, waving arms, and shaking voice of the director, while the latter adjured him loudly, "Think of it, Walter! Just think of it! The very heart of you torn bleeding from your bosom! Flung bleeding to the ground before your feet!"

Byron did not bat an eyelid. I fancy that he did not find himself particularly moved by the grisly picture thus vividly conjured up, though tears stood in Hayes Hunter's eyes by the time he had got through with his rehearsals of the scene. But Henry Forbes and I were less stolid. I fear we spoiled more than one run-through by the expression of feelings quite out of keeping with the solemnity of the military ceremonial. And the representatives of the British Army almost went into hysterics. As several assured me later, it was the best comedy "turn" they had seen for years. . . .

By about five o'clock in the evening everything at last was ready for the final "take." Hayes Hunter had practically been reduced to silence through hoarseness. Continual repetition had dulled the entertaining angle of the business from the point of view of the soldiery. Mellow evening sunshine flooded the scene, promising at least half an hour of adequate lighting. At this point it was discovered that the camera crew had run out of film. A car had to be despatched to Islington to secure a fresh supply. And, by the time it had returned the light had gone, and the day's work had perforce to be abandoned. . . .

It was my first experience of an aspect of film production which continues to puzzle me. It may be simply that the money of film companies is spent on such a scale that trivial mistakes, and miscalculations not so trivial, are not regarded with any particular seriousness. The frequent absence of any hard and fast "dead-line," both in budgetting and timing must, I suppose, lead inevitably to a certain casualness in expenditure and procedure. But when—as was the case with a recently produced "luxury" picture—a unit goes out on location for months at a time, and is recalled without a foot of film to show for its trouble; when—during a period of war and ration-cards—some hundreds of pounds' worth of real food is used for the rehearsal of a banquet scene only to be scrapped because it had wilted under the lights at rehearsal, it is surely permissible to wonder whether the whole industry might not benefit from the importation of rather more rigid business principles, and from the application of some elementary economic ABC.

I was already at Savoy Hill when I was given my next opportunity to see something of a film in the making. One of the best-known of British producers was attracted by the picture possibilities of one of Eric Maschwitz's musical comedies of Middle Europe. It combined the advantages of that sure-fire winner the "Cinderella story" with some very charming music by George Posford. Having produced the piece for broadcasting I was naturally interested in its transfer to the new medium. And the producer was kind enough to let me spend ten days of my annual leave in the studio, and even to let me play a small part in the film to provide me with an excuse for being there.

I do not wish to seem ungrateful to the producer in question. But I must confess that while I was vastly interested, I was also considerably shocked by what I saw. Box-office considerations presumably dictated the casting of two well-known musical comedy stage stars, who were admirable at their own job, but whose proper *milieu* was clearly the West End of London rather than—let us say—Ruritania. But I did not understand then, and do not understand now, what good purpose could be served by building a "set" before the scene in which it was to be played was written—the more so when that set was a vast ballroom, implying the engagement of several score of "extras," all in uniform or ball costume. And I found it hard to take seriously a condition of affairs in which it was usual for the principal dialogue-writer engaged for the picture—who was, incidentally, a dramatist of no mean reputation—to spend most of his time playing a solitary game with a tennis-ball against a discarded "flat" in a remote corner of the studio. As dialogue lines were called for, scene by scene, a small boy would be despatched to interrupt the player; and the lines would be brought back by the same agency, scribbled "off the cuff" on

to the back of an envelope, or any other bit of scrap-paper which the writer could find in his pocket at the moment. . . .

It was during the making of this picture that I realised the immensity of the problem that may be covered comprehensively under the label of "waiting about." I was assured only the other day by a film-technician who seemed to know his business, that to get three minutes "into the can" can be considered very satisfactory as a day's work in the case of any film whose making is at all elaborate. And nothing can surely be more difficult for a director than to prevent the delays and hanging about, inseparable from a complex technical set-up, from reacting disastrously on nervous and temperamental actors. During those ten days which I spent at Elstree, although I was anxious to see everything that I could, I could not but be chiefly impressed by the hours during which actors could do nothing except sit about and wait. I don't think that a single one of those days passed without my being practically compelled *faute de mieux* to read right through some work of sensational fiction. I do not pretend to be able to suggest a solution of the problem. But again, when I am told again and again by actors of my acquaintance of the number of "calls" they have had resulting only in a day's unwilling idleness, or of "calls" for nine o'clock in the morning followed by a first rehearsal for a "shot" at six in the evening, whether organisation does not tend to be neglected, which could at any rate lessen the amount of time squandered in dressing-rooms and canteens. At any rate, I feel that I am on firm ground in maintaining that actors do not and cannot do their best work in such conditions; that they are like other human beings in being liable to demoralisation as the result of being paid for doing nothing.

That something can be done about it—when considerations of limited money and time are present—was proved to me some years later, when a small company was formed specially to make a film adaptation of *Death at Broadcasting House*. This was a detective-story written in collaboration by Eric Maschwitz and myself. As a book it had had a considerable success, and it seemed to our untutored minds that it was from the film point of view "sure-fire." Broadcasting House, if only as a new building and rather a box of tricks, was still "news." Most people seemed curious to know what went on behind its concrete battlements; seemed eager to enjoy any opportunity of "seeing the wheels go round." We thought, with comprehensible vanity, that the story, if rather on the complicated side, was both ingenious and exciting. But, even if it were neither, it seemed to us a copper-bottomed commercial proposition, if only because the programmes of the B.B.C. willy-nilly gave its background daily and nation-wide publicity. Leading British film moguls were not to be persuaded. We tried one well-known company after another without the least success. It was left for three young men, anxious to break new ground on their own, to

see the possibilities, and raise what now seems the wretchedly puerile sum of £16,000 to make the picture. I am glad to think that Hugh Perceval, Basil Mason, and Reginald Denham were rewarded for their enterprise. Even in this present year—1945—the picture crops up for showing in out-of-the-way houses. Presumably because the money at their disposal was limited a good deal of care was lavished on the organisation of the unit. The picture was made in a comparatively small studio at Wembley. Scheduled for twenty-eight days' shooting it was made in twenty-nine. I was in the studio almost every one of those days, and on no occasion was the assistant-director unable to let me know on my arrival whether I was safe to make arrangements for dining in town that same evening. I may add that the moment the story had been sold to Phoenix Films, the moguls, previously disinterested, not only pricked up their ears, but became positively plaintive, if not aggrieved. The best-known of them indeed, on whose desk a copy of the book had reposed—probably unread—for rather over nine months, complained bitterly to Eric Maschwitz that we had been ridiculously over-hasty. A second, not quite so well-known, did his best to make out that he had always intended to make the purchase, and that a telephone conversation in the course of which he had quite clearly said "no," ought to have been interpreted as saying "yes" . . .

I hope it will not be considered presumptuous to suggest that the *Death at Broadcasting House* picture and its making offers lessons worth study by those interested in small-scale films. Expenditure was very sensibly allotted rather to the settings than to the cast, which, apart from Mr. Ian Hunter, was made up of actors, admirable, but not "stars." It was remarkable how everyone who saw the film took it as a matter of course that it had been almost entirely "shot" inside Broadcasting House—which even if desirable, would have been physically impossible. Then the original story was very largely adhered to—and where changes were desired the original authors were consulted as to their making. It is true that an evil tradition added some indifferent low-comedy relief. A good deal of the dialogue seemed to have little relation to characterisation. But as I was playing a fairly important part in the picture, and was therefore present at the taking of a large number of scenes, it was not difficult for me to restore quite a good deal of the book's original dialogue on the grounds that, as an actor, I found it easier to speak. The engagement of a first-rate camera-man, who had learned his business in the German UFA studios at Neubabelsburg under Fritz Lang, ensured the giving of full value to the film's pictorial possibilities. Reginald Denham—whose first picture-directing assignment I believe it to have been—did not conceive it as his business to teach his experts their jobs. And the general atmosphere during production was one of keen and

business-like co-operation, which made taking a share in it a pleasure.

I must confess, regretfully, but truthfully, that the same could not be said of *Royal Cavalcade*. This was one of several pictures made at the time and in celebration of the Jubilee of King George V. Admittedly it was rush job, bristling with difficulties. Personally I found it hard to believe that those difficulties were lessened by putting no fewer than five directors on to the handling of the picture. The reason for my own engagement was obscure, except that I was known as a frequent collaborator with Erich Maschwitz, who had thought of a central—and most ingenious—theme round which the film could be put together; and that I had had a good deal to do with a number of various broadcast “features” dealing with anniversaries and official occasions. I was indeed assured that one of the film’s salient points was to be the accompanying narrative, which was to be written and handled in a manner analogous to such broadcast productions. When the time came, however, the said narrative was handed over for direction, not to me whose business it was, but to a charming titled lady, whose ostensible role in the unit was that of “social adviser”: one she was eminently qualified to fill. It was not her fault that her narrative-direction lacked something. Nor was it the fault of any of the five directors that their respective methods failed to turn out a harmonious whole. The picture turned out a cross between a Neapolitan ice and the proverbial curate’s egg. It must have cost a great deal of money. And I am afraid that it proved a considerable disappointment to the late Mr. Maxwell.

There are two questions which I pose continually to members of the film industry. To neither as yet have I had a satisfactory answer. The first is, why do producers of films think that the handing of a story on from one author to another—and the engagement to boot of dialogue-writers, who have had nothing to do with the writing of the original story—is likely to improve it as a film vehicle? It is simply the fact that once dialogue could be added to pictures, characterisation in film-stories automatically came to depend upon dialogue, as does characterisation in stage-plays. No theatrical manager is so mad as to believe that it would be a good thing to take the plot of a play, and hand it over to three or four writers to write its dialogue. If a story-writer cannot write stage-dialogue—and many story-writers cannot—he is not a playwright, and the theatre goes elsewhere for its material. But film producers seem to conceive of dialogue as something to be spread over a story like butter. And they have established it as an axiom that a new hand should do the spreading. I have been told quite recently of a film whose story can be summarised briefly as follows: Owing to the War Boy meets Girl. Owing to circumstances inseparable from the War Boy is separated from Girl. Owing to the War Boy is reunited with Girl. It does not seem unduly complicated

or difficult as a theme. Yet no fewer than eleven writers of reputation wrote, rewrote, and trewrote it. And—possibly as a result—the script was not complete when the picture started “on the floor.” Yet no one, except the writers concerned, seemed particularly concerned or astonished. When I was visiting Hollywood in 1938—both James Hilton and Erich Maschwitz were under writing contracts to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Scripts were being prepared of *Balalaika* and of *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, which had been written, respectively by Maschwitz and Hilton. I believe, indeed, that it had been largely the great success of *Balalaika* which had induced M.-G.-M. to offer Maschwitz his contract. However it was *Goodbye Mr. Chips* which came ultimately to be scripted by Maschwitz—after having passed through several other hands including those of Mr. R. C. Sheriff—while Mr. Hilton was busied with an adaptation of part of *The Forsyte Saga*. *Balalaika* was handed over to a couple of Hungarian scenarists—presumably because its settings were in Russia and Paris—and I believe that Maschwitz had great difficulty in obtaining permission to see the result, even to satisfy a not unnatural curiosity. For which indeed there may have been good reason. I never saw the finished article. . . .

All this is the more curious when it is remembered that there is plenty of evidence to show that the best film-work results when the idea, from first conception to final realisation in pictures, remains in a single hand. Charles Chaplin, Ernst Lubitsch, Antony Asquith, Hitchcock and René Clair—to quote the easiest and best-known examples only—have proved as much. Conversely it is only necessary to call in evidence such a film as the recent production of Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square*, in which a subject, pre-eminently filmable, was distorted in hands other than the original author's so as to be not only unrecognisable but absurd. Period, setting, dramatic climax, and very largely the character of the principal figure, were all ruthlessly and murderously changed. And in this case certainly there could be no question of inability on the part of Mr. Hamilton to write dramatic dialogue. His work for the theatre is more than sufficient defence against such a charge, if indeed that charge was delivered as explanation for the otherwise incomprehensible.

Which leads me to my second question. Why do film-critics so frequently display almost complete ignorance of the original plays, novels, and stories from which films are adapted? Miss Dilys Powell, Miss Arnott Robertson and Mr. Agate are shining exceptions to this generalisation. But for the most part the critics of films seem anxious to make their readers believe that they have not time in which to do anything apart from visiting the cinema. Miss Lejeune, for much of whose criticism I have the greatest admiration, once fell foul of me for a criticism which I had written—by invitation—of the Hollywood pro-



duction of *Romeo and Juliet*. It seemed to me that, for all its technical accomplishment and lavishness of setting, the picture was a mere travesty of Shakespeare, largely because Miss Shearer and Mr. Leslie Howard played along lines suitable to light modern film-comedy as opposed to those of Elizabethan tragedy. Miss Lejeune rebuked me on the grounds first that it was Miss Shearer and Mr. Howard whom the public wished to see, and not *Romeo and Juliet*—she may have been right, but in that case why not choose a rather more obvious vehicle? On the souvenir programme of the first London presentation, which I have carefully preserved as something of a curiosity, the late Mr. Thalberg announced his masterpiece under the caption "Boy Meets Girl—1436" which was getting down to brass tacks with a vengeance!) In the second place Miss Lejeune said flatly that my opinion of the inadequacy of the famous stars' performance was merely a personal one—which was true enough—and added that in her own Mr. Howard's work was "scholarly," Miss Shearer's "moving and almost impeccable." I might have been moved to slightly shamefaced apology, considering Miss Lejeune's infinitely superior qualifications as a critic of films, had she not, at the opening of a debate on the subject, in which we were invited to oppose one another, admitted with engaging frankness that she had never seen a stage performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. It may be possible to make a case—Miss Lejeune indeed made it—for hitching the the Shakespearian wagon to a pair of film-stars with the object of making the work of the greatest of dramatists familiar to the vast film-public which never visits the theatre. But the critic should, I feel, know better than the public, which relies upon him for guidance, or what he is he for? And I continually find myself reading notices of films adapted from plays familiar to every theatre-goer, in which the previous existence of the originals are blandly ignored, and the problem of their re-presentation in a different medium is not even considered.

Had Miss Lejeune, for instance, been familiar with stage performances of *Romeo and Juliet* she might have been moved to wonder why that play should have been chosen in preference to the infinitely more filmable *Macbeth*. (But she might, of course, have boggled at the imagination of Miss Shearer as "Lady Macbeth." And, after all, *Macbeth* is supposed to be an unlucky play.) With the exception of the Olivier *Henry V* the treatment of Shakespeare by responsible film magnates has been not so much criminal, as singular and mistaken. Mr. Alfred Hitchcock perhaps came nearest to the mark of plain blunt commonsense, when he said frankly in a broadcast talk that Shakespeare had nothing to contribute to the cinema except his plots—which, he might have added, were for the most part not his own. But, as it happens, what is needed in film-treatments of Shakespeare's

plays is *uncommon* sense. And it is that which as a rule has been lacking. It is perfectly true that there is the stuff of popular entertainment in the slap-and-tickle of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in the blood-and-thunder of *Othello*, in the comedy-pastoral of *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But in the plots as such there is very indifferent merit. Without their splendour of language the Elizabethan drama tends to the penny plain and tuppence coloured against such improbable backgrounds as the sea-coast of Bohemia. The problem before the producer of films is the problem of how to make his audience, which for the most part is attuned and accustomed to the pungent brevities of American idiom, accept the convention of speech expressed in blank verse. The characters of "Falstaff," of "Petruchio," even of "Cleopatra" are perfectly acceptable to the film-fan. They are even welcomed, if Miss Lejeune's recipe is followed, and they are clothed in the fleshly attributes of—let us say—Charles Laughton, Errol Flynn, and Claudette Colbert. But acceptance of their speech is another story. And the opening sequences of *Henry V*, which, by being laid in the original Globe Theatre, made perfectly natural and simple the blank-verse convention by identifying the cinema audience with the audience in the Globe, were as satisfying as they were brilliantly ingenious. It is no use pretending that because Shakespeare was a great humanist and a great dramatist that he wrote *for* the pictures. It is no use to call "Macbeth" a gangster, "Ophelia" a dumb blonde, "Cleopatra" a floozie, or "Timon" an unpopular Congressman, and then by appropriate casting to imagine that popular box-office entertainment will follow as the night the day. The heart and soul—and justification—of Shakespeare's plays are in the words, the lines, the speeches, which he wrote. Establish the acceptance of their convention, and Shakespeare will look after himself. To try and put him mentally, as it were, into modern dress in the minds of the cinema audience is to deprive him of his quality without making the adaptation even vulgarly acceptable.

In the autumn of 1936 I saw at close quarters one of the various attempts made to pluck the flower of popularity from the dangerous Shakespearean nettle. A film was being made at Denham called *Men are Not Gods*. Its story was that of the Shakespearean actor who becomes jealous of his wife in real life, and almost murders her in character when playing "Othello" to her "Desdemona." Miss Gertrude Lawrence played the wife, Mr. Sebastian Shaw the husband. The director was an Austrian of some distinction, who had achieved great success with light film-comedies of Viennese life. As his command of English was not his strongest point, and as Sebastian Shaw had recently broadcast in Shakespeare under my direction, the latter suggested that I might be co-opted for dialogue-direction of the

Shakespearian sequences. Mr. Korda (as he then was) agreed. I was delighted. I liked working with Sebastian Shaw, and the opportunity to make the acquaintance, however slightly, of Miss Lawrence was by no means to be neglected. Exactly what Mr. Walter Reisch's views on the subject were I never ascertained. He was always perfectly polite to me, and our conflicts of opinion never became violent. I think that he was probably not awfully happy about the assignment. A machine-made melodramatic and improbable plot was hardly the best raw material for a director whose *forte* had been proved to be Viennese *soufflé*. And his main interest in the "Othello" scenes seemed to be confined to an odd passion which he cherished for the Coleridge Taylor setting of the Willow Song. Miss Lawrence's "Desdemona" was a little handicapped, it seemed to me, by a platinum-blond wig, a black diaphanous and sequined night-dress, and a full orchestra to accompany the song aforesaid! What made things difficult, as far as Mr. Reisch and myself were concerned, was the fact that he knew his Shakespeare extremely well—in *German*. Indeed, his familiarity with what I am assured are first-rate translations made him loth to believe that the rhythm, accentuation, and pace to which he was accustomed, were not by any means suitable for their English equivalent. I fear that between us Sebastian Shaw had rather a thin time of it. For me the experience was made more than worth while by the opportunity given to me to work even for so comparatively short a time with Miss Gertrude Lawrence. Her vitality was as inspiring as her gaiety was infectious. Her delicious private burlesquing of her own performance destroyed any possibility of criticism. My only regret is that the circumstances of our brief association were not more propitious.

I doubt if *Men are Not Gods* made much money for its promoters. The film did, however, make a small place for itself in theatrical history, in so far as the filming of its theatre sequences took place in the old Alhambra; and those scenes from *Othello* were the last scenes played upon its boards before the theatre was given over to the housebreakers. Was I pandering to a disposition unreasonably sentimental in feeling a certain pang because the Alhambra's last audience consisted of picture "extras," paid to occupy the seats which I could remember filled with mud-stained men on leave watching *The Bing Boys*, and the most fashionable of first-night audiences at Serge Diaghilev's ill-fated attempt to revive *La Belle au Bois Dormant* in all the glory of Imperial Ballet? Was I cynical in wondering if Shakespeare had ever been played before beneath those domes, in the environment of that gilding and those mirrors, whose disappearance—together, perhaps, with that of the Empire Promenade—has deprived Leicester Square of the greater part of the character which endeared it, not only to Londoners, but to all Englishmen throughout

the world who had ever heard "Tipperary" sung by a battalion entraining for the front?

Since the making of *Men are Not Gods* my personal connection with the making of films has been confined within the limits of dialogue and scenario writing. To claim any special *expertise* as a critic would therefore be unwarrantable. Yet I believe that, to the onlooker who is interested in the cinema either as entertainment or art, certain disquieting facts must be reasonably apparent. At the head of the industry are able and accomplished men, whose main interest cannot help but be a financial one. This is not a reproach. It is a conditioning factor, which must be of extreme importance and influence. At the heart of the industry is established a body of able and accomplished technicians, whose representative organisation shows a tendency, surely regrettable, to adopt a political line. Between these two powerful and efficient forces directors and actors and writers are dragged to and fro. Theirs not to reason why. Theirs but to work, and draw their pay-cheques—cheques of such a size as inevitably to qualify artistic prejudice, or even integrity. There is also that mysterious, yet hugely influential body, the distributors—never visible to the naked eye except at "trade-shows." And some experience of the latter occasions the suspicion that distributors are not unaware of the value of the "stand-in" or the stooge. The prevailing impression of the industry is that of a force, hypothetically dynamic, compounded of many excellent ingredients, with many men of talent, integrity, and good-will, groping for the levers of control; but also of a force for the most part directed without concentration, and with effects far too scattered, because there is a basic absence of precise thought as to its correct application.

Is it entirely presumptuous to suggest that most of the industry's axioms, for example, might well be reconsidered and recast in the light of the experience of the last ten years? Most of them have grown musty. Many at least are admittedly harmful. The commercial axiom that the average age of any cinema audience is twelve years old; the Hollywood axioms that the Public go to see Stars not Pictures, and that no original writer—unless like Preston Sturges or Orson Welles he proves the rule by an outstanding personality abetted by rather vulgar freakishness—can write a film-script without help from half-a-dozen proved hacks; the English axiom of the desirability of leisurely *tempo*, proved stage actors, and moral standards that conform to the respectability of the suburbs of twenty years back; the Russian axiom that no film must lack its political slant; all these, and many more of the same *genus* might surely be first dusted and then brushed off for the dead wood that they are. Might they not well be replaced by applying some of the more obvious lessons of experience?

The answer may well be that what appears so obvious to the outsider,

whose interest in films is limited to a weekly visit to the cinema, is not really of importance to the industry as an industry ; and that problems of finance and of distribution must and should be deciding factors. The outsider, with little or no experience of the figures and statistics and personalities, is not, of course, in a position to argue further. None the less he can hardly be blamed for apprehension and disquiet. For, as with the theatre and with broadcasting, in the long run neither the machinery nor the hierarchy of control is decisive. What matters is what appears on the stage or the screen ; what is heard over the loud-speaker. The people who matter—regardless of their incomes, which may be inconsiderable to the magnates, or their temperamental idiosyncrasies, which may be exasperating to their elders and betters—are the directors, the actors, and last—but very much not least—the writers. The power of creation, its technically skilled interpretation, and imaginative direction of both creators and interpreters, combined with a genuine love of drama as a medium of expression and artistry, are essential if the film is to flourish, as opposed to surviving as a vulgar concomitant of a vulgar age, and paying dividends as a sublimation of the White Slave traffic. Yet for the most part the cinema pays the writer for anything and everything except original work ; the actor for exploiting his personality rather than his skilled craft ; and the director for finding the best success-formula and sticking to it. And where the genuine enthusiast of integrity and taste looks for public support to back him up in his struggles with executives, usually well-meaning but also usually philistine and occasionally just crass, he finds all the resources of the industry's skilled publicity directed to the stressing of its least desirable attributes. In which connection I cannot help but stress the debt owed by the public to critics of the calibre of Miss Dilys Powell and Miss Lejeune, who have always done what they could to restore the balance ; also, perhaps strangely, to Mr. Agate who, while never failing to express his fundamental contempt for the cinema and all its works, has done more for the film which he despises, than for the theatre which he so evidently loves.

It may be urged that this view can only be applied justly to the products of the essentially unreal Hollywood world, and its British imitations ; that the French and the Russians have proved how the cinema can be related to reality, and find a soul in the process. But it is fair to remember that we only see the cream of such foreign output. I have seen bad French and worse Russian films, which have shared all the Hollywood vices unqualified by the almost invariable Hollywood technical accomplishment. As long as they deal with subjects representative of the contemporary civilisation which they understand, directors like Capra and Ford have little or nothing to learn from their European opposite numbers. *The Road to Frisco* and *Stage Coach* for example, stand up perfectly well against *Quai des Brumes* or

*The General Line.* It is when Hollywood tries its hand on the would-be imaginative, or the dramatic-historical—*Lost Horizon* or *Marie Antoinette*—that it comes to grief—and even then, with a certain magnificence of grief—from a lack of the necessary sophistication, which it has been taught to mistrust as decadent.

What the British film industry needs, most of all it would seem, is to get rid of its inferiority complex. In stature it has grown immeasurably during the years of war. Such films as *In Which We Serve*, *The Way Ahead* and *Henry V* would be a credit to the output of any country in the world. New men of a new calibre have found their way into British pictures, and their future depends on the continuance of this intake. Eric Ambler and Peter Ustinov, Noel Coward and Carol Reed, Olivier and del Giudice, may not trail behind them the glorious clouds of having been connected with British pictures ever since such pictures were synonymous with cheapness, dullness and provincialism. But so far from being undesired or mistrusted interlopers, they should be the hope of the British film business. They should be encouraged and cherished accordingly. *The Man in Grey* or *The Madonna of the Seven Moons* make money. They will never make reputation. And while the industry must without doubt make its bread-and-butter pictures, it is by the quality of its cake that it will in the long run be judged in the world-market. It will be a thousand pities if parrot-cries about "monopoly" are allowed to imperil that quality; just as it will be a thousand pities if trades-union prejudices are allowed to obstruct common-sense working in studios for the sake of statutory cups of tea, and to interfere with the engagement of distinguished foreign technicians, in order to ensure continual employment for natives of this country, whose qualifications end largely with their citizenship. It is true that, apart from Mr. Rank, the three most powerful personalities in the British film industry to-day are two Hungarians and an Italian. But as none can be found to deny the outstanding abilities of these gentlemen, their position should be a reason for emulation rather than for envy and antagonism.

Above all the British industry would do well to bring the new writer into the business; to take the risk of giving him a free hand. To do so would be absurd without also making some arrangement by which the writer can learn the alphabet of film-scripting. It is not as difficult as all that. It is certainly no more difficult a technical job, given application and experience, than the proper laying-out of a piece for the theatre. At present, between the original writer and the shooting-script is that deadly layer of scenario experts and hack dialogue-writers who can be trusted never to let well alone lest their jobs appear superfluous, and whose effect upon the genuine author is to sicken, disgust and exasperate. It is difficult to believe that Hollywood, save in exceptional cases such as I have mentioned, will ever shake off this

part of its over-elaborate factory-mechanism. And it is only fair to admit that the Hollywood "hack" is in a different—and superior—class from his British equivalent. But here, as in most departments, the British industry would do well not to try direct competition with California. The British story-teller has always been in the front rank of authors. The telling of tales is recognised as one of the finest manifestations of British genius. No author with any kind of pictorial imagination can fail to respond to the temptation of the film medium—to its infinite possibilities of pace and design, of elaborate splendour and simple subtlety, of vast canvas and microscopic detail, leaving aside the implications of Gorgeous Technicolour. At present the author tends to regard the film industry as a rather incomprehensible cow, which he may be able, with luck and at some expense to his self-respect, to milk. Is it impossible to imagine circumstances in which the industry might rather be regarded by the author as in some sort an altar upon which he should be proud to lay the best work of which he is capable?

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN INNOCENT ABROAD—3. HOLLYWOOD—NEW YORK

IN 1938 I completed ten years of service with the British Broadcasting Corporation. In those pre-war days—which now appear so halcyon—this meant that I became entitled to a special four months' leave with pay. It was not the least of a number of conditions which added attractiveness to a broadcasting career. The question arose as to what I should do with it. I had long intended to go abroad—and to make use of an exceptional opportunity for going further afield than I had ever found possible before. But where? To date I had never been outside the confines of Europe. For some reason I have never felt particularly lured by "the Gorgeous East." Various acquaintances' accounts of officially conducted tours in Soviet Russia had not been encouraging. I fear I am not especially Empire-minded, from the travelling point of view. South America was too far, and too completely *terra incognita* for one who knew no Spanish, and was going alone.

Other conditioning factors were a not inconsiderable—though to others completely unimportant—emotional upheaval, and a physical state of deplorably lowered vitality. It was then that Eric Maschwitz, who had recently secured a writer's contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, suggested that I should spend a part of my leave with him in Hollywood, where, I gathered, he felt the need of a little society not altogether esoteric. And, as my doctor recommended a sea-voyage

to help me pull myself together, I decided to go out to Los Angeles by way of the West Indies and the Panama Canal, and to return by way of New York. I had, of course, intended to drop all work—in particular everything connected with broadcasting work—absolutely for the period of the trip. Needless to say I could not resist the temptation to make contact with some of my opposite numbers in American Radio. And before I had started I had committed myself to one production for the National Broadcasting Company of America during the last week of April or the first week of May.

I leave my diary of the resulting trip to speak for itself, because I believe that day-to-day impressions immediately recorded are more honest, and more interesting, than an account qualified by a "long view," edited in the light of future knowledge. But it is fair to emphasise that my reactions—to Hollywood at any rate—were those of a casual visitor not of a professional on a visit of technical inspection; and that those reactions were perforce coloured to an extent by temporarily indifferent health. I have omitted a good deal of purely personal matter. I have substituted the anonymity of initial letters for various names. Otherwise the account stands as it was written, with all its imperfections on its head. . . .

*February 28th.*—Aboard the *Europa* (not the great German liner, but a Danish cargo-steamer of some 1,200 tons, which carried thirty to forty passengers), and at last—it is past four in the afternoon, and I was up this morning at seven—away past the Wight and westward into a sea and sky illimitably grey. Cabin, complete with bathroom, on a most agreeable scale. A capital luncheon. Other passengers few—I gather that we fill up when we reach Jamaica, and that then I shall no longer keep the cabin to myself—and on first sight in no way remarkable. Most are Scandinavian. But there is an Englishman with his wife and child returning to Vancouver, an ex-Naval Commander, and a couple of nice-looking girls in their early twenties obviously already in the highest of spirits. I must look on the voyage as a genuine rest-cure, the first in years, and try to get really fit as a result.

*March 1st.*—Awoke to bright sunshine, which persisted most agreeably all morning. A fair amount of pitching but not enough to bother me, though a number of people put in no appearance for breakfast or luncheon. The Chief officer proved himself a nice friendly creature, and the afternoon was enlivened by boat-drill. I finished Cedric Belfrage's book on Hollywood, which struck me as fair journalese, but desperately tuppence-coloured—maybe inevitably so—and dreadfully formless, for which there is less excuse. I shall try to start a new book with the month this evening, for already I feel, or think I feel, fitter, and almost as if ideas might flow, which would be a pleasant change. I feel quite unbelievably far from England, while



broadcasting might almost be non-existent. I got a radio late last night from Ed Murrow to wish me *bon voyage*, which was more than nice of him.

*March 2nd.*—I did not work after all. In the afternoon I felt desperately sleepy, and as I have determined during my leave to succumb to temptation whenever possible I just slept—in the intervals of re-reading *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* which I persist in believing to be one of the few novels of our generation with a chance of survival. This morning I woke to the lovely sight of a three-masted Danish training-ship under full sail: glorious against the sunrise. Our accompanying gulls have turned back to-day, and the natural desolation of the "ocean-sea" is proportionately increased. Various people are beginning to emerge from the passenger-list as individuals, most of them apparently amiable. The Commander, I fancy, views my beard with suspicion. However, he thawed when we began to converse about rearmament, in some aspects of which it seems he has had some hand. He rather implied that Goring might get more than he bargained for in the event of anything starting up. Not that it will be much consolation to the Londoner, observing the scarred ruins of his city, to know that the same is being done, even with interest, to Frankfort and Cologne! I fear I feel no increasing tendency towards sociability in general, feeling again pretty seedy. Probably the highly-seasoned Danish food quarrelling with my inside!

*March 3rd.*—I buckled to work after dinner, and wrote nearly two thousand words—the Prologue to a new thriller (*This was The Red Account*). It was sunny all morning, but did not seem any warmer for all that we are in the latitude of Oporto. Played a little deck-tennis with the ineptitude I display at all games. . . . I find it hard to believe that this is only my fourth day at sea. The timeless monotony tends to bore, and I think I shall be weary of it before we first touch land at the Virgins, which is scheduled for to-morrow week, and might as well be a year away.

*March 4th.*—I managed to get the first chapter of the new book written last night alike to my pleasure and surprise. It is such a change not to feel that one is writing against time; so that one can wait for the word or the phrase, and tear up with a clear conscience. We still get London news bulletins, nearly two hours early of course, and it is queer to hear the voices of one's colleagues coming out of the blue into the ship's lounge. There seems to have been the devil of a flood in California, and especially in Hollywood. I hope Eric and his house may not have suffered. I shall look silly if I arrive to find nothing there!

Woke this morning to find us passing the Azores. Rain clouds heavy all day. It is most certainly odd not to have enough to

do. . . . We shall not sight land again now for six days, and I anticipate pretty severe boredom by the end of them.

*March 5th.*—Yesterday evening by persistence in trial and error ultimately got the gramophone in the saloon to function. Whereupon gaiety broke out with a bang! Two elderly Danes, Mr. and Mrs. M., and the two girls whom I have christened the Light Infantry started up dancing. My prestige sky-rocketted when I confessed that I not only knew the author of the lyric of *These Foolish Things*—which was one of the few records available—but was actually on my way to stay with him. It is a little warmer in the sun, and one could get into flannels for the first time.

*March 6th.*—Worked again on the book last night, and achieved the sleep of a good conscience! Hot enough to-day to lie out in the sun without a coat. One of the Danes threw a cocktail party in honour of the fortieth anniversary of his being commissioned in the cavalry! I did not know that the Danes had any cavalry—at any rate, since Ramillies. Got a radio from Titterton (*of the National Broadcasting Company of America*) to say that they want me to handle “Lepanto” (*a treatment for broadcasting of Chesterton’s poem, which I had already produced with some success in England*) on April 27th.

*March 7th.*—Finished another chapter of the book last night and went to bed early. I didn’t feel up to coping with more Danish whoopee. Slept like a log for nine hours. . . .

Began to re-read *Crime and Punishment*; the usual vile translation. An American couple, the woman with the typical pretty legs, the man with the typically incipient paunch, are proving nice and friendly. The Light Infantry are chased—in an ingenuous and innocent way—by most and sundry, including the ship’s doctor. I am not sure that Mrs. M. is altogether liking it. . . . One should be able to experiment with the swimming-bath by the fore-hatch in a day or two.

*March 8th.*—Finished yesterday with an idle evening and ping-pong with M. and the Light Infantry. It was one of the most lovely starlit skies I ever remember seeing, and work seemed not only unnecessary but actively an impertinence.

It’s exasperating that the badness of the Dostoevsky translation renders it almost unreadable. Relations with the Light Infantry have now reached the stage of practical joking—apple-pie beds, and expeditions armed with cold sponges before sleeping.

*March 10th.*—A really magnificent tropical day. We made our land-fall quite early in the morning, and were into St. Thomas by midday: a charming little harbour, with the multi-coloured roofs of the town behind it giving a curious impression of Italy. With Mr. and Mrs. M. and the Light Infantry took a car out to the American military airport, where we bathed superbly on the most perfect beach I have

ever seen: white sand, deep blue water, and not a soul. The town itself is pretty ramshackle—well worth while to look over, and I should judge deadly to live in. We went up to Drake's Seat from which there is a stupendous view to the north over the sea and the islands. It was amusing to hear the negro chauffeur speak of Drake quite simply as "one of dem pirates"! We were told of some American millionaire who lives in a fantastic sort of castle he had built on the crest of the mountain. He is reputed to live alone except for male servants. The chauffeur observed of him caustically that he wouldn't have women there at any price; hated even to see a woman walking about. "Guess he's a man as prefers to save his money!" was his last word on the subject. . . .

My fears over my cabin were well-founded. A Canadian judge appeared this evening. He seems a pleasant old gentleman, but I am told he is not too well, and it will hamper my doing much in the shape of work.

*March 11th.*—The first lap is completed, and we were off again by eight this morning. Hot and airless. Various sun-baked islands in sight most of the morning, looking rather like the Channel Islands except for their sugar-cane plantations. I was naively astonished yesterday to see a banana growing for the first time. . . .

Such news as we get from the great world seems singularly gloomy. In particular the fall of the French Cabinet at this moment seems unfortunate. How long will Hitler just look on at Nazis rioting in Gratz—and if he goes in, what will France do? Finished at long last the Havelock Ellis *Psychology of Sex*. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but it seemed to me to be making very heavy weather of the mostly obvious—almost ideal reading for a sea-voyage!

*March 12th.*—Very hot again to-day, and bathed twice. Sunning in the extreme bows after the second bathe most agreeable. Heard rather dramatically over the air the news of the Nazi occupation of Austria. What will be the end of it God knows. The Italians appear to have been squared for the moment—presumably by the promise of German support for their negotiations with the English and French over the Mediterranean. And with the French still lacking a Cabinet there is nothing to be done. Hitler's head will, of course, swell proportionately, and the next thing will be a precisely similar approach to Czecho-Slovakia, and the fat will be in the fire. Without being unreasonably bloodthirsty one cannot help wishing that someone would bomb him in Vienna to-morrow when he enters in triumph. This triumph of grown-up boy-scoutery is pretty intolerable. . . . Tore up my first attempt to tackle a fragment of autobiography.

*March 13th.*—My first glimpse of the Southern Cross late last night. Less impressive than I had anticipated. Arrived at Kingston early

this morning : a far more conventionally tropical impression than one had had at St. Thomas ; low houses, palm trees, really sticky heat. Went ashore early with Mr. and Mrs. M. and the Light Infantry, and took a car out to Spanish Town. Some pleasant scenery, particularly up by the river dam, where the level reaches and vivid greenery made one think of the Cher in high summer. Saw quantities of turkey-buzzards, floating and scavenging, most sinister-looking wild fowl ; also a turtle and a mongoose. It seems the latter were imported to deal with the native snakes ; did so with complete effect ; and now, in default of snakes eat the island's chickens, and so will probably have to be classed as vermin and exterminated ! Returned by way of the gorgeous colouring of the Botanical Gardens to a hotel to bathe and have luncheon : the usual all-the-world-over luxury caravanserai where you are overcharged for everything you don't want, and can get nothing that you do, like a newspaper or decent service ! The food was good but monstrously dear. . . .

We sailed with a tough wind rising at four in the afternoon. Many new passengers, mostly American aboard. Bathed in the pool with L. (*one of the Light Infantry*), but the wind was impossible. I cut my head, nearly lost my pipe, and gave up in a bad temper !

*March 14th.*—Frankly my principal concern is with the news, which seems to be going from bad to worse. My nerves are excoriated by the snippety radio bulletins, and the crassness of attitude displayed by most of my fellow-passengers, who continue to display English "phlegm" in its most exasperating form ! The *Anschluss* is now a fact, and—as Philip Jordan prophesied before I left—the English radicals are now screaming for strong measures. Now, when it is too late, when we have practically handed back to Germany everything we fought and won the last war to deprive her of, it looks as if we propose to adopt the French point of view. So we shall probably end by fighting for Czecho-Slovakia, which, unlike Austria, has yet to be justified as a pillar of western civilisation ! Presumably things will be settled for good or ill before we reach Los Angeles, but it makes the writing and reading of cheap fiction, clean fun with the Light Infantry, and gossip with Mrs. M., all seem a little futile ! I spent much of last night walking the deck by myself, in the hope of tiring myself enough to achieve sleep. . . .

*March 15th.*—Woke and rose early just as we began to dock at San Cristobal. Ashore for an hour's stroll after breakfast, but the atmosphere even at that hour was that of a turkish bath, and I thought the town a mixture of the touristy-pretentious and the stinking-squalid, and was glad to be back on board. Got newspapers, which seemed to confirm one's gloomier fears.

Set off a little after eleven for the passage of the Canal : an astonishing piece of engineering work in its setting of real jungle.

It seems that the place is guarded all over, the Americans being genuinely apprehensive lest the Japs get at it somehow. Many planes about, the U.S. fleet manœuvres having started yesterday. Passed the Gatun Lock at lunch-time. Heat now really terrific. . . .

*March 16th.*—I found the Pacific end of the Canal far the more impressive of the two, with its fortified islands, and wooded hills against a riotously yellow sunset. Many pelicans and birds I call torpedo-gulls in flight in the dusk. Read in a charming book of Willa Cather's, *Shadows on the Rock*, with the grave dignity typical of her work, and a lunatically lewd novel by Thorne Smith, lent to me by one of the Americans.

The Pacific is so far living up to its name, being even calmer than was the Atlantic. Met a pleasant American who had seen my brother John with Lilian Gish when he was playing "Hamlet" in Boston last year. He is a tennis-player of some repute, and looks an athlete save for an incipient stomach. I could not like his sweat-shirt of many colours. Two schools of porpoises and a number of islands broke the monotony of an unremarkable morning. I believe most people are going ashore this afternoon. We have put into the first of five Central American ports where we are taking in cargo. I am staying on board. It is quite hot enough on the water, and, as D. remarked when invited to join the party, one damned banana plantation is very like another! Also I feel it would be silly to pick up a fever germ in the jungle at this stage of the trip.

*March 17th.*—We continue to sit in this scrubby and unattractive little port, loading bananas in quantity—some 15,000 bunches I am told—and sweating horrid. A full moon over the calm of the Pacific with a good deal of cloud about made an astonishing picture. . . .

To-day it seems hotter than ever. I am now frankly bored with the boat, the more so as the news degenerates daily. The French threaten to send troops to Spain to counter German support for Franco. Poland is being rude to the Lithuanians, and swearing never to let Russian troops cross Polish territory to help the Czechs, while people all over Austria seem to be set on shooting themselves instead of Hitler! There is still no sign of a definite statement of English policy. In short we seem to have gone back to 1914 without change of mind or heart. Frankly I should not be surprised any day to hear that the Boches had raided London or Paris, and here I feel as isolated and helpless as if I were in the moon. I know it is absurd to get panicky, but I cannot help it. I don't understand why in this heat we continue to be fed on hot soup and heavy meat dishes, with rum cocktails. Most of the latter I pass to the Light Infantry, who receive them with thanks!

*March 18th.*—We got away at last about nine at night, and it was most agreeable to get a fresh breeze again. Much summer lightning

affare on the northern horizon. Much cooler this morning after a rain-storm in the small hours. There followed an ideal blue morning with the coast of Costa Rica—very like Dalmatia in its bare grandeur—as a background, and streaks of porpoises, gulls, and one indubitable whale in the foreground. Re-read *The Narrow Corner* with my usual admiration for Maugham's work. This evening a wind getting up the awnings came down in a hurry. Little definite news—the bulletin was again muddled—but there seem to have been riots in Paris, ghastly air raids over Barcelona, and an ultimatum to Lithuania from Poland. I imagine Jas. (*my Polish cousin*) must be expecting anything at Wilno, where his battery is quartered.

*March 19th.*—This morning we put into the little roadstead of La Libertad in San Salvador, and took bags of coffee on board from lighters: a picturesque and sufficiently barren coast in the background, and the lightermen looking like all the crooks that ever were in gangster films . . . The Polish news looks grim this morning, except that it seems that most people expect the Lithuanians to imitate the Austrians and take their medicine *faute de mieux*. I am only afraid that it may mean that the Poles may have decided to go in with the aggressive *bloc*, and can't help wondering whether a free hand in Lithuania may not have been their price for a revision with Germany of the situation in the Corridor.

*March 20th.*—Yesterday evening we put into San José in Guatemala for more coffee. The captain gave a cocktail party, and it seems that this is the last stop before Los Angeles. I hope it may be so. Considerable dancing after dinner. The American Miss J.—tire-somely over-educated as to conversation, presumably as the result of running a modern infant school in San Francisco—came out strongly as a dancer. Bathed about midnight with L.—the pool was lovely, with flashes of phosphorus and great patches of moonlight.

To-day is almost the loveliest we have had: calm as a lake, plenty of heat but a fair breeze, and lots to look at. Spent most of the morning between bathing and sitting right up in the bows with L., the sea literally crawling with huge lazy turtles, and glittering with mauve and silver flying-fish. Saw also porpoises and three small sharks. Started in on *North-West Passage* and found it immensely readable if no literary masterpiece. News a little quieter to-day, but I see that Mexico, along whose coast we are now passing, is taking a hand in the general game of animal-grab by expropriating foreign oil-properties. I have managed to do quite a bit of work these last three days, finishing another chapter of my book, and drafting the idea for a new detective-novel based on the personalities aboard the *Europa*. (*This got no further.*) I fear it may be difficult to take up a normal existence again after this bout of lotus-eating, but it has certainly done me no end of good. . . .

*March 21st.*—Bathed in the morning and sat in the bows, but there was none of yesterday's marine fauna, except a few flying fish and one solitary turtle. The coast of Mexico—we passed Acapulco during the morning—shades of the Elizabethan seamen—looked magnificent: a straight line of shining sand, backed with low brown hills against a further background of big blue mountains, all very savage and desolate. Destroyed the rest of the autobiography fragments: pretentious, pompous, and bad. Finished *North-West Passage*: it fritters itself away after a capital first half. Result of insufficient preliminary construction? The Poles, flushed by the Lithuanian climb-down, seem now to be clamouring for straight annexation. So it goes on. And Adolf Hitler's portrait has replaced the Duke of Windsor's in the Vienna Hotel, Bristol!

*March 22nd.*—To my regret we seem to be getting out of the really hot zone. Last night it was quite chilly outside the saloon. To-day the pool is too cold for bathing to be enjoyable. I have never seen mountains so literally blue as those of the Mexican coast-line. Everyone much occupied with a deck-sport tourney in the afternoon. These seem invariably, and not unamusingly, to bring out the worst in one's fellow-passengers. I contributed to the general gaiety by allowing myself to be used as a chopping-block at deck-tennis.

Dipped into a tiresomely consequential autobiography by a fairly well-known journalist. It follows the usual pattern: stories about "The Chief" which do their best to prove Lord Northcliffe a mediocre exhibitionist, while intending to prove him a genius; stories smart-alec, sentimental, snobbish; the usual revelation of a mind lacking in both taste and education . . . a disagreeable reminder of a world which at the moment it is pleasant to think of as being a long long way away. . . .

*March 23rd.*—Finished a fairly profitless day yesterday with a tiresome and at times acrimonious discussion of contemporary political tendencies. Miss J. thinks infant psychiatry a cure-all for the world. Young W. (*an undergraduate of London University*) believes in some woolly notion of general good-will, including of course good-will by everyone towards the idea of the supremacy of the English-speaking races. The Chief Officer (*Danish*) believes in a new United States of Europe under the domination of Germany. Miss S. (*an English spinster-schoolmistress*) believes in the British Empire, which unfortunately she seems to identify only with the *Daily Express*. I was relieved when the Captain came down from the bridge and told stories of how he had smuggled Russian refugees across the Baltic from Petrograd during the Civil War. . . .

Did about a thousand words of the book to-day. Lower California

is now in sight to starboard. Radioed to Eric to look for me about noon on Friday.

*March 24th.*—Quite certainly colder to-day, with a high wind and a good deal of pitching. Much gaiety last night with a gala dinner and dance, paper hats and trimmings. To bed about one. . . .

I am depressed by the problem of packing. The judge—his illness turned out to be merely the habit of secret drinking, which did not improve him as a cabin-mate—is not inclined to be helpful. My lighter has gone wrong. And I have finished the last of my books—a semi-fictional life of Goya written in pure American which was quite awful. I leave it to the ship's library without regret. If all goes well, I should write the next instalment of this journal in Hollywood.

*March 26th.*—So this is Hollywood ! The wind made us several hours late getting into San Pedro, and Thursday night was disagreeably rough. However we finally docked about four in the afternoon, and Eric was duly waiting for me with appropriate properties in the shape of a Korean chauffeur-manservant and a large Packard car. He appeared in good form and quite unchanged. One's first impression is of a place without form and void, sprawling, unfinished, a forest of oil-derricks ; wide roads and fast cars ; low houses ; far more lights than Budapest, infinitely less effective. Whirled up to Beverly Hills, where Eric has a charming little house that belongs to John Balderston. Our nearest "stellar" neighbour in Rodeo Drive—nomenclature perfect—is Rosalind Russell, who has a big house about two blocks away, marked by a police patrol. Fears of Kidnapping or just Publicity ? It seemed odd to be back on *terra firma* and to realise that the *Europa* and her passengers did not make up all that was left of the world. . . .

We dined at a pseudo-English eating house, "The Cock'n Bull," and ate tolerable imitation English food. Slept well, though it took a little time to realise that for a change the bed was not swaying.

*March 27th.*—To-day is fine and warm, and everything looks lovely. Lunched with Eric, one Van Buren, and a girl-friend of the latter's at a tennis club, where Cesar Romero, looking regrettably unshaven, was playing backgammon with a concentration that seemed to me excessively gloomy. Had the meal been breakfast it would have been capital !

The evening was like a rather amusing nightmare. We got into evening clothes, and were joined by Charlie Grayson, a young American writer of enormous vitality and engaging personality ; Frances Glendinning, a most attractive girl, who is I gather a *mannequin* of repute with leanings towards writing work in fashion-magazines ; Victoria Faust—a large-scale blonde, training for opera in the intervals of being married to one of the many agents here—



nice, vague, and temperamental; and an ex-Charlot-show-girl, who was pleasant but had an astonishing capacity for drinks and a more astonishing craze for the cheaper types of symphonic music. Dined at "La Maze," where among other people were Greer Garson and Tilly Losch. Food not bad, though served in so much ice as to taste of little, and in far too great quantity. A good little band, and some dancing on a diminutive floor. Thence, about eleven to the Clover Club—dancing and gambling—which reminded me of a cross between a Corner House and one of the minor circles of hell. Charles Bennett and his wife, and Wilcoxon among others. Dolores Costello, looking tragically *passée*, Claire Trevor, and various large-size executives with remarkable names represented the Studios. Most people were quite simply and normally drunk. The high-spot of the evening was reached for me, when a lady remarked, "You know, Mr. Gielgud, no one can get into this joint without considerable social backing!" We stayed until about two, talking and dancing—all three girls danced admirably—and then home to go on talking until five in the morning of everything from Radio and Pictures to Naziism and Philosophies of Happiness! I enjoyed it a good deal, as I always enjoy conversations that remind me of undergraduate Oxford, but I was appalled to find that same woolly-mindedness which J. W. had displayed on the boat, repeated in these American young women. If at all representative (*I fear they were*) Young America combines a flaring materialism of outlook with a half-baked and ill-defined humanitarianism, complicated by a general-good-will-to-all-men plus hope-for-the-best attitude towards a wicked world, which I find hard to bear! Finished skimming through a tiresome and rather dirty book by Briffault, before finally sleeping as the light came through the blinds. . . .

Rose about nine, seemingly little the worse for last night, and spent most of the day out at Bill Lipscombe's ranch, where he has a small private golf-course. Lunched about four in the afternoon at the Brown Derby!

To dinner with Tom Blake—fat, amiable, amusing—and Maria his wife—dark, Southern, exceptionally attractive—at their house, which looked like a converted European hunting-lodge. They couldn't have been kinder or more hospitable to the stranger within their gates. None the less it is no more than the truth to say that conversation hardly exists here. There is the gossip of intimates. There is scandal. Otherwise the order of the evening would seem to be infantile games combined with limitless Scotch. I try not to resent the practise of using Christian names upon introduction—though I never have quite reconciled myself to that English stage habit. And I did my best not to be too ingenuously

shocked by stories relating to the familiarity of High School girls with various peculiar methods of contraception . . .

*March 28th.*—Overcast and suddenly much colder. Lunched at the Brown Derby with Eric, Tom Blake, and Lipscombe. Lewis Milestone there. In the evening Eric had collected a party for me of people whom I had at one time or another known in London: Isobel Jeans, looking as always just out of a band-box; Reggie Gardiner, of train-imitation fame; Heather Thatcher; Greer Garson, very decorative in a pink hat and green gloves; Cedric Belfrage and his wife; Charles and Faith Bennett; Monckton Hoffe, preserving all the atmosphere of the little parish of St. James's; Ben Nedell and Olive Blakeney; all most agreeable and friendly. From my point of view perhaps the highlight of the party was Una Merkel, who turned out to be as amusing in real life as on the screen, with the most charming manners to boot. Finished up at a steak-eatery between ten and eleven with Eric, and a girl who had had a row with her boy-friend and wept continuously into her orange-juice. I find I have little or no appetite. The food all looks wonderful, and tastes of precisely nothing at all—or alternatively of cotton-wool.

*March 29th.*—Lunched on the Metro "lot" with Eric, Tom, and a girl called Jane Hall, who has recently got a writing contract as the result of two or three successful magazine stories: very young and wide-eyed, and trying to appear ever so hard-boiled! I rather liked her. After which Tom ran me up to Isobel Jeans' house on the top of the hill, whence one could see the whole panorama of Los Angeles stretching out to the sea: a vast sprawling and astonishing spectacle. Eric joined us for dinner, during which my morning injection came back on me with a bang, and I as nearly as possible passed out over the soup! Left early accordingly.

*March 30th.*—Took Tom Blake and Maria to luncheon at the Vendome, which I understand to be one of the smarter restaurants. The food not bad, but ludicrously dear. At dinner met Frida Inescourt and her husband, and Mr. and Mrs. James Gleason, the latter a regular trouser of the old school. She told a story of Mrs. Langtry touring with some vaudeville gang. She always insisted on having a red carpet laid from her dressing-room to the stage. After a week or two of this the tougher members of the gang starting laying rolls of toilet-paper . . . I found the dinner—at Chaseon's—as indifferent as I am sure it was expensive. We soon ducked out and went to the Redmans—a nice house and nice people—and talked London stage gossip, which was rather a pleasant relief . . .

*March 31st.*—A really hot fine day, so it is infuriating to feel below par like this. The Columbia Broadcasting people have now asked me to do a show for them in New York, in addition to the one I am

doing for N.B.C. I must try and fix it so that I can still sail with Eric on the *Normandie*. I continue to be staggered by the drinking habits here. I have never before seen people consume half tumblers of Scotch-and-iceberg at eleven in the morning. The object is clearly to achieve first "kick" and then insobriety as quickly as maybe. No question of taste can possibly arise . . . Lunched with Tom and Eric at the former's club, which was less like an English club than could be imagined. We dined with Jane Hall in her pseudo-Spanish apartment. There also one of the writers for Fox, a girl called Eleanor Morris who was amusing and pretty. The first really edible meal I have had here, though as usual in America too much mixing of sweet and sour. It is amusing to meet people, by no means generally naïve, who simply cannot believe that there is such a thing as an incorruptible judiciary, or that courts in England would jib at cases being conducted on vaudeville act lines. Home and to bed about one.

*April 2nd.*—Since I last wrote in this diary I have been pretty well laid out. I had to spend all yesterday in bed, and last night was one long recurrent sweat bath. To-day I feel better, and the doctor seemed pleased. But it does not make life much fun. We drove out to Palos Verdes and dined there at the La Venta Inn on Friday night. Drove through mile upon mile of eateries and hot-doggeries and all the other ramshackleries which seem to make up about two-thirds of the towns along the coast from Los Angeles. Palos Verdes stands superbly on a bluff on one side of the bay, so that we looked over a great gulf of darkness, pin-pointed with riding-lights, to miles of flickering glittery beyond. The place itself was quiet—for once no blaring radio, and few people.

Lunched with the Blakes and spent a most agreeable afternoon of sunshine and siesta on their verandah. It seemed quite odd to see a couple of movies in the evening after so long . . .

*April 3rd.*—The Light Infantry turned up for a cocktail in the evening. They appear to have bought a car and to be burning up the town! They propose to drive bang across the States, which for a couple of kids and a tuppenny motor seems venturesome but rather touchingly gallant. I hope they make it all right. We went into the Lipscombes' en route for Isobel Jeans' dinner. The latter is completely unchanged by Hollywood, and perhaps for that reason likes the place. Her house is lovely with its staggering view. Effie Atherton and her husband there also. I enjoyed myself and much liked Isobel, whom I had only met superficially before: shrewd, more than decorative, and I should judge, a thorough realist . . .

*April 4th.*—Dined down town at Perino's, where the food was much above Hollywood average, and saw Monckton Hoffe there. After

to the new Lubitsch picture with Cooper and Colbert. (*This was Bluebeard's Eighth Wife.*) Z. and a couple of cuties, all to appearances both amorous and drunk, sat just in front of us. Who was whose it was impossible to say! I fear the Savoir story is creaky now, but the direction was full of witty things. To bed not long after midnight.

*April 5th.*—Lunched alone, and tackled the first of my articles for the *Evening News*. (*A series of four which appeared after my return.*) Frank Steininger, a pleasant Austrian composer of light music, and Charlie Grayson came in for the evening. Then Lindsay Wellington (*one of my B.B.C. colleagues*) turned up—here for two days. We all went to dine at the Victor Hugo: fairish food, but a crooner at full blast at seven in the evening, and a lot of couples dancing in the odd Hollywood mode of evening clothes with jewels for the ladies, and sweat-shirts and flannels for the men! Reggie Gardiner appeared afterwards, and we adjourned to his flat where he gave us his solo turns until well after midnight. He had promised us Hedy Lamarr—but she came not, which was disappointing . . .

*April 6th.*—Collected Lindsay in the morning, and ran him around in the car for a little before meeting Eric and Jane Hall for luncheon in the M.G.M. Commissary. After which a pleasant publicity-man walked us all over the "lot." A hot and tiring performance, as it covers a hundred and eighty acres, and includes every damned thing in the world from a dentistry to an infant school for Metro prodigies. There are lumber yards, planing mills, the fourth largest music library in the world, furniture stores, general stores, and a private zoo; a vast gymnasium, a fight-arena, a river, and a lake in which a good-sized steamer can float. The unreality of everything takes you by the throat as you walk along the great semi-permanent sets, the city streets and railway stations, which are left standing until the space they fill is wanted for something new. We walked across the cathedral square of *Romeo and Juliet*, turned a corner and faced the court-house of *Fury*. We passed through a *Tarzan* jungle into the walled yard of the penitentiary of *The Big House*. The little French church of *The Big Parade* still stands; so does the front of the Castle of Finkelstein out of *Marie Walewska*, and pieces of Versailles left over from *Marie Antoinette*. One expected to run into Garbo or Shearer or Tracy any moment—and had to be contented with a sight of Robert Young. Some of the streets and houses are so solid in their apparent reality that after leaving a "lot" one began to look automatically behind genuine buildings for false backings and occasional backcloths! In those workshops they can make everything on the spot from a period breastplate to a torpedo-boat destroyer. It was perhaps as well to be reminded of the fact that it takes the thought and labour of on

an average two hundred people to put one close-up of one "star" upon the screens of the world . . .

Dined with Cedric Belfrage and his wife, Molly Castle. Miles Mander there also. A good deal of political talk which I found rather tiresome as Cedric believes fanatically in the new Russia as the equivalent of the New Jerusalem. I take leave to find the parallel strained.

*April 7th.*—Lunched at the "It" Café, where Anna May Wong was playing hostess in aid of a fund for Chinese and Spanish refugee children. Anna May as charmingly decorative as ever. I like her much, and she is invariably sweet to me. Later Cedric motored us out to Pasadena to see Upton Sinclair, passing the Forest Lawns Cemetery, where trustification has been applied to the limit to the whole apparatus of death and burial, and Thalberg lies in his 3,500-dollar vault. Flowers supplied on the premises. Music, sacred and maudlin to taste, is discoursed permanently on the organ. And your final resting-place is neatly graded according to your plutocratic standing. The nearer to dead "stars" you wish to lie, the more you must pay—the late Miss Harlow being, I gather, the summit of this grisly pyramid.

Sinclair lives, with a certain irony, almost next door to the millionaires' colony. He lives alone but for his wife and an Alsatian dog. No servant. And neither liquor nor tobacco allowed on the premises. Furniture strictly and hideously late Victorian. And shabby—he is evidently hard up. I am told he was crippled financially by his running for the governorship of California a couple of years back, when his campaign scared all the plutocrats almost to death. We sat on rockers and encouraged him to talk. He seems rather like a seedy rural dean. Then suddenly he looks at you full face, and becomes furiously disquieting with big blazing eyes. He is full of vitality, but politically is surely a back-number as a genuine radical of the old school. Violently class-conscious and pro-Russian, nevertheless he cannot quite get his conscience round to acquiescing in Bolshevik ruthlessness, which Cedric and his friends are happy to eliminate by ignoring its existence. He said that he believed in an inevitable Second World War, which would be followed by revolution everywhere, including America—a cheerful prospect! At half-past ten the Alsatian ambled in with a note from his wife—who did not appear—attached to his collar. We were then presented each with a glass of water, and a copy of *The Flivver King*, and so took our leave. A queer, fascinating personality in some ways as unreal as most other people here, but considerably more worth the trouble of seeing . . .

*April 10th.*—Just back from Santa Barbara, whither we had motored yesterday afternoon, after lunching at The Bit of Sweden. We

went nearly a hundred miles through Ventura, and so saw something of the countryside. It is lovely in a not very convincing way, being somehow essentially stagey. One cannot but recall the tale of the English stage-manager who said of the whole Hollywood set-up that he felt that if only he called "Strike!" there would be nothing left the next morning. The roads are however magnificent. We stayed at the Biltmore Hotel on a headland jutting out into the bay. Jasmine, orange-blossom, and a nightingale in full song just outside the window . . . To the Lobero Theatre to see the Odets play, *Golden Boy*, in which Lederer was giving a capital performance. Good theatre, I thought, until the last two scenes when it fizzles away to nothing. Most of the playing was good, in the American manner, but I thought the production monotonous with its consistent quick-fire technique which can be as overdone as typically English four-wheel-cab *tempo*. Saw Lederer after, who was very pleasant, and Ben Welden, whom I was delighted to see again.

Left about three the next afternoon on the return journey, this time by the coast-road through Malibu and Santa Monica. This road still pretty bad as the result of the big flood, and many of the bridges still temporary. I confess I found it a little fantastic at the Biltmore to find on the luncheon menu "breast of turkey *à la Marie Tempest*," and to eat in an enormous room empty save for a young woman on a platform at the far end, wearing a Grecian robe, and playing the *Valse Bleu* on a harp! Also to find one of the highways towards Brentwood solemnly, if unconvincingly, labelled Charing Cross Road. But I suppose I shall in time lose my capacity for astonishment . . .

Charlie Grayson brought June Knight in for drinks before dinner. She is most attractive, especially as now she has gone ultra-blonde again: a lovely dancer, and looking very smart in a short tight white coat and trousers. . . .

*April 11th.*—Heard at last from Titterton that things are lined up with N.B.C. for *Lepanto*. Got most of my second article done, but it is remarkably hard to work in this environment. Dined with Effie Atherton and her husband. A good dinner. Played "The Game" afterwards—that odd form of super-charades which is all the rage here at the moment. To me it appeared as only requiring too much effort, and productive of too much childish loss of temper. But then I never did care for children's parties. . . .

*April 12th.*—Spent most of the day at home, as Eric was working on the script of *Goodbye Mr. Chips*. Read Lyons' book *Assignment in Utopia*, which should be given to all pocket-communists to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. Steiningner came in before dinner to play Viennese waltzes charmingly on the piano, followed by

Miss Y.—who had as usual drink taken, and was by no means to be prevented from displaying the scar of her recent appendix operation!

*April 13th.*—Eric is now firmly tied by the leg to his script, so I tend to find myself rather at a loose end. All one's natural instincts seem most curiously atrophied. Lunched at the Brown Derby and met Pat HOFFE there with HAYES HUNTER. Coped with my third article during the afternoon.

*April 14th.*—Tom Blake called to take me to see my first baseball game on the Wrigley Field. I found it both scruffy and tedious as an entertainment, though it was enlivened by an audience which had to be seen to be believed. Peanuts, hot dogs, and beer in what looked like petrol-tins, were being hawked under a broiling sun. Both sides and onlookers alike howled at each other throughout the proceedings—so unlike an afternoon at Lords. In the evening to El Capitan to see the Maxwell Coffee Hour broadcast with the Metro stars. A slicker, more gilt-edged version of our shows from St. George's Hall. The advertising inserts seemed silly beyond belief, when read out by an announcer in front of a vast audience. Robert Taylor compered with much charm, and young Bartholomew stood up well to an interview with some aged editor who was presenting him with a gold medal, and fluffing horribly on his script. I find all these stars surprisingly amiable in their attitude to perfect strangers, who must as a rule bore them no end. It may be part of "the act," but they seem quite without pretentiousness, while their manners are quiet and charming: FANNIE BRICE . . . FLORENCE RICE . . . JUDY GARLAND . . . and that admirable actor FRANK MORGAN. Called for Anna May at her apartment and dined at PERINO'S. Thence to The Cocoanut Grove. As usual most of the men were in unconventional dress, with ladies *en grande tenue*, while much of the dancing seemed to belong rather to a Palais de Danse. A good floor-show, with BERGEN and CHARLIE MACARTHY in terrific form, and Templeton, the blind composer-pianist, also excellent. We looked into a little down-town café on the way back, to see a boy doing a turn which Anna May thought promising, and had a certain naive charm.

*April 15th.*—Out with Ruth Taub and Rita Cooper to play golf at the Riviera Country Club: a lovely if wearying course, which the flood had knocked about a good deal. Much to my surprise, as I was using Tom's heavy clubs, I found myself seeing the ball perfectly, and did a very nice round. . . .

After dinner with Eric and Charlie went to the Bali, a rather pleasant little dive in which an unhealthy-looking pansy sang songs of considerable obscenity with a cleverness worthy of a better cause. The Columbia people have now asked me to produce *Fours into Seven Won't Go* for them immediately after the N.B.C. show,

which will make the New York visit business as well as pleasure with a vengeance.

*April 16th.*—Out to Bill Lipscombe's ranch, and played golf with him and Eric. Won the game to my intense surprise. Thence to Nancy Carroll's apartment for a cocktail. A young woman there also, very much out of the Social Register, who began every sentence with "Of course, you know Lord Beaverbrook—or Lady Queensberry—or what have you." As I couldn't claim such acquaintance conversation was limited. Was I unfair in feeling that I had encountered that odd phenomenon, the entirely useless human being? Her life consisted in persistent movement between Biarritz, Antibes, Paris, New York, California, and more recently Salzburg, mixing in precisely the same type of set in each place. The motivation of the whole exhausting business appeared obscure, unless it was just habit. It was clearly not pleasure. . . .

Mahmo Clark, the Hawaiian girl who played opposite to Gable in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, dined with us at La Maze. A pleasant simple evening. M. proved most attractive with superb eyes and figure. But for a slightly pinched nose she would be a real beauty. Oddly enough she did not dance well. . . . The weather has improved again. It was delicious to be able to pick oranges warm from a tree, and eat them directly after one's golf-game. . . .

*April 17th.*—Rose rather late, spent an idle morning, and after lunch was motored out by Lynn Wade to see a polo game. It was interesting to go out through down-town Los Angeles, and see the squalid districts that survive of the original town. It came as a shock to see people actually walking on the pavements, which is unknown in Beverly Hills unless someone is walking a dog. . . . A good hard game, one Perkins playing most beautifully. Pedley, the international, whom I remember seeing at Hurlingham, was out of form and temper to judge by his language. . . . To Frank Steininger's house for cocktails with him and Della Lynd his pretty wife. Nice furnishing, but the outside a horrible bastard imitation Tudor—a style which seems popular here. Dinner at the Trocadero, which has a fine view from the Strip over the lights of the city. The crowd was rather a mixed one—Done Ameche, Mary Brian, Wilcoxon and Tommy Farr being the celebrity high-lights—the food elaborate and poor, the floor-show tiresome. It appears that the top-line stars seldom appear at any of these public places—unless driven by publicity agents—or their lives are unliveable owing to the behaviour of their "fans."

Drank some brandy later at the Tropics. It was so warm that one could sit out as though on the Riviera. Black coffee to wind up the evening at the Brown Derby.

*April 18th.*—Picked up Anna May Wong at the Park Wilshire, and to



the Paramount "lot," where we lunched in the Commissary. Akim Tamiroff sat with us for a time : a pleasant simple person from South Russia, a little amused that having been for the first time cast in a Russian part he has been given one appropriate only to a blonde giant from the North. Was introduced to John Barrymore, who looked pathetically old and flabby, Miss Lamour, who is certainly most decorative, and that admirable actor Lloyd Nolan. I was then carted about by a vigorous, but not very efficient, publicity man, and watched scenes from *The Texan* being shot : Joan Bennett, Randolph Scott, a herd of cows, several horses and plenty of Redskins having fun inside a studio on specially imported grass. Then visited *Spawn of the North* in the making. Was photographed, rather self-consciously, with Henry Fonda and George Raft. The latter enquired eagerly after the Victoria Palace, which seemed to mean London to him. Men were wading about in a vast tank with most ingenious *ersatz* icebergs for model shots. They were also filming *Farm of Women*, with Mae Busch and Anna Q. Nielsen, and a pretty friendly starlet, Shirley Ross, whom I thought delightful.

Almost more interesting than the shooting in progress was the wardrobe and the armoury. In the former Edith Head, middle-aged and evidently most capable, with twinkling eyes and a page-boy bob, explained the mysteries of dressing stars, and controlling a wardrobe which has to cope at short notice with hundreds of costumes of any conceivable period. Each of the stars has a "dummy" on which her creations are in the first instance modelled ; an exact replica of all necessary measurements ; and I was snapped with my arms round these "stand-in" figures of Miss Lombard and Miss Dietrich, with appropriate emotions. The armoury, which looked big enough and lined with enough deadly material to equip all the gangsters in all the films and most of the American army to boot, is as a fact under Government jurisdiction and inspection. It has to be. It is so large, and there are so many guns in it. Finally, Anna May, with typical good nature, allowed herself to be made up so that I could watch that highly skilled process at close quarters, admire—and thank God that there are other ways of earning a living ! Few things impress more here than the discomfort of the film star's life. . . .

*April 19th.*—Lunched with Manuel del Campo, Mary Astor's husband,\* a good-looking and very pleasant young man, who had been at Clifton with Felix Felton. Then paid another visit to Metro to see Margaret Sullavan, James Stewart and Walter Pidgeon working in *Shopworn Angel*. Both Pidgeon and Stewart were extremely agreeable and friendly. Saw for the first time something of "star temperament" in operation in a scene between Miss Sullavan and

---

\* At that time.

the director, which struck me as considerably better theatre than the scene which was being shot.

In the evening the Blakes gave us a farewell party—Laura Perelman, Jane Hall, Charlie Grayson, June Knight—got up to the nines and looking terrific—and best of all, Robert Benchley, who more than came up to expectations : charming, friendly, unaffected, and immensely amusing. We adjourned to his apartment in the Garden of Allah—more sublime nomenclature—about half-past two, and the Blakes dropped me home a little after four. . . .

*April 20th.*—To lunch with Benchley : admirable and almost exclusively liquid, lasting until half-past four in the afternoon. Thence back for our "bar-clearing" party, to which Eric had asked everyone who had been nice to us during our visit. It was extremely gay, and ended with X kicking in a glass-panelled door out of sheer animal spirits. But for me it was a trifle melancholy, as I believe it to be true that one can never do anything for the last time without regret. Some of us dined after at the Victor Hugo, where most people appeared—for some obscure reason—in Tyrolean costume. I am principally saddened at having to say good-bye to Maria and Tom Blake, who are without doubt two of the nicest people in the world. . . .

The next day Eric Maschwitz and I left for New York in *The Chief*. When I was told that there was another train called *The Super-Chief* I felt a certain sense of let-down. But the journey was sufficiently long and comfortable to enable me in some sort to get my reactions into perspective. It was difficult, for most of my recollections immediately took on the characteristics of a news-reel : messengers, wearing Lincoln-green, and riding motor-bicycles, delivering tickets for a preview of *Robin Hood* ; a working oil derrick, planted in the centre of a principal street, and other derricks standing up out of the sea just south of Santa Barbara ; a script-writer bent over his typewriter wearing a skiing cap, a dressing-gown, and a sophomore's overcoat ; young men driving cars in the full sunlight of Californian mornings along Sunset Boulevard, with young women draped negligently across their chests ; Monckton Hoffe, sitting imperturbably and gravely in a stationary car, listening to a Wagner concert by radio ; wise-cracking asides into a microphone by Aimée Macpherson during her sermon ; studio Red Indians having their skins reddened artificially before going on to the set ; the curious absence of twilight ; Drive-In Eateries, where young women in the tightest possible red and green trouserings bring out food to your car on a tray ; writers walking up and down "in conference" outside their offices, inside which the telephone renders work out of the question ; being urged by radio to raise a loan on furniture or automobile, taught by radio how "to tackle your little

emotional day-to-day problems," incited by radio to cure alcoholism, propagandised by radio on behalf of the anti-fascist league with a dramatic sketch mentioning Goebbels by name in terms which—in England—would have provoked an international incident. All these things, and many more, tended to leave in the mind a kaleidoscope without form and void. I felt that I had taken it—and there only remained to leave it.

Yet the implications were both serious and terrifying. If the hope of future civilisation lies in the United States, the future of the United States is in no small degree dependent upon the activities of Hollywood. Generations of young Americans are doing their best to model their lives upon the roles they see played on the screen by their favourite stars. And while I believe that many of the stars realise the implied responsibility, I very much doubt if the same is true of the executives who decide on what pictures shall be made, and what angle of life they shall represent. At the risk of seeming priggish or even absurd, I must confess that I left Hollywood with the belief that what is wrong is an absolute lack of any basic standard of æsthetics; of any yard-stick other than a material one. When *Lost Horizon* was made into a picture, Hollywood was given the opportunity to show the world its ideal in the way of the escapist's Utopia. What emerged was a cross between an industrial World's Fair and an idealised Blackpool. It was inadequate.

Behind everything else one was forced back to the use of the word "unreality." The truth is that the place has no character. It is after all just a little patch of California. The desert is at its doors. The desert soil is under it. Take away the water of the Owens River, and the desert would come back. A sense of fundamental impermanence is of the essence of Hollywood. It has always been a country of pioneers, a makeshift. In the first place it had to be. Now—because in Hollywood no one has the time or the inclination to finish anything—it always will be. So it remains unfinished. This is the more apparent because the area concerned is so vast. The distance across the Los Angeles city boundaries, including its affiliations such as Culver, is fifty-three miles: almost as far as from London to Oxford. That is why the most finished things about the place are the roads. You must go anything from six to sixteen miles for the normal activities of daily life, and you go by car. Which is why one out of every sixteen cars in the world goes to Los Angeles.

Hollywood has often been referred to as a "Mecca." It is characteristic of Mecca, I believe, that many people speak and write of the longing to go there; but that you do not hear of people acquiring merit by staying there. In the same way Hollywood has no background, in the English sense of the word, because nobody wants to live there for its own sake. They go there to make pictures, to make money, and to

get away with as much of that money as a fantastically high standard of living allows.

You streak along those admirable roads at eighty miles an hour. You are going twenty miles for luncheon, ten for your cocktail, and a further fifteen for your dinner. You streak past shacks, past bungalows, past monstrosities of sham European architecture, past lovely little Spanish-American houses. You pass through a chaos that might have sprung up overnight: the great studio-lots, the gas-stations, the multi-coloured fruit-markets—Ed's Taj Mahal Beanery. From the crest of the hills you look right across the San Fernando valley to the sea, and you think inevitably of the Riviera and the Corniche road. But the latter, for all their picture-postcard qualities, are real. The former keeps always the quality of a painted "drop."

Nature joins in the conspiracy. In Hollywood the life of a tree is only fifteen years—but it bears three crops a year. The flowers are outsize and look magnificent—but they have no smell. The food—though in the length of Hollywood Boulevard you can sample every brand of cosmopolitan cooking—looks wonderful, and tastes of next to nothing. Everything is on the one hand grandiose; on the other, impermanent. So that you are hardly surprised to be told that you can have a new lawn grown for you in four weeks; or that, if you care to pay for it, you can have your house shifted literally from one street to another. It is just lifted, put on wheels, trundled along the boulevard and set down on its new foundations. I was assured that this was done even with solid office blocks of steel and concrete. Can it be possible that by taking so much oil out of this earth the flavour and quality and reality have gone out of it also?

That Americans are the most hospitable and kindly people in the world has become a commonplace. It is none the less true and worth remembering. Nor were people in Hollywood any exception to the rule. Entertaining, friendliness to the stranger, enjoyment of "the party spirit," were all conspicuous by their presence. At the same time I was always conscious of an underlying sense of strain. Most people have no sense of security. The only standard is one of materialism measured in terms of hard cash. The soda-jerker of to-day may be the star of to-morrow. The converse is also true. No one is able to sit back and relax. No one can afford for one instant to miss the chance of "a break." Which explains the apparently childish importance given to picture "credits." Never before in my life had I seen human beings treated so blatantly as raw material. I met more than one youngster of presumable talent and indubitable good looks, who was bewailing his or her fate in having signed a long-term contract which implied existence in Hollywood, but did not provide work before a camera. One evening at a party I tackled a highly placed film executive on the point. I asked him why he thought

it worth while to send talent-scouts to Europe, and bring young men and women six thousand miles in order to sit about in the sunshine and eat out their hearts with unfulfilled ambition. "Mr. Gielgud," was his reply, "you are evidently big-hearted. I think of these girls and boys just as a grocer thinks of pots of jam on his shelves. Maybe a customer will come in one day, wanting that sort of jam. Then it's easier, and it pays us better, to have it right here on the shelf, ready and waiting." I cannot help feeling that this story is worth pondering by young hopefuls, who believe—and are encouraged by agents to believe—that the offer of a Hollywood contract is the key to their Garden of Dreams. I would be inclined to suggest that they would always be wise to insist on a return-ticket as the first clause in any such contract.

Arriving in New York from Hollywood was like leaving a greenhouse for the high Alps. It made no difference that the mountains were skyscrapers, thickly populated, and constructed of concrete and steel. The atmosphere was electrically invigorating; enormously alive. No doubt the difference in climate was the principal factor. There is no need for me to contribute my quota to the amount that has been written about New York's "champagne air." But there could be no question of anything unreal, anything "phony" about New York. Its genuine quality was almost literally stunning, from one's first sight of the Empire State Building and the Rockefeller Centre, to the sound of the subway. I was assured on all sides that New York is not America. That may be true. Nevertheless, it is far more representative of America than Hollywood can ever be. Hollywood has become Cosmopolis through the power of its purse, which draws thither the assorted talents of the artistic world. Unless Hollywood can learn how to use and co-ordinate that talent, it is merely milking civilisation. New York lost no time in providing make-weights to that depressing conclusion.

If Hollywood had confirmed my apprehensions, New York certainly surpassed my expectations. Various people had warned me against various aspects of New York. They had told me that anyone who had, as I have, a slight tendency to claustrophobia, would find the height of the buildings, the canyon-like streets, alarming and depressing. They had insisted upon the self-conscious rudeness affected—especially towards Englishmen—by New York taxi-drivers, porters, and bell-hops. As far as the incivility was concerned I may have been lucky. Eric Maschwitz is always a good "mixer" and always gets on with Americans. He was not strange to New York, and I owe him as much gratitude for his chaperonage as for his company. But as far as taxis, hotel and restaurant service, porters and strangers in the street were concerned, I met with nothing but courtesy and efficiency—until I was actually going on board the *Normandie*, when an Irish baggage-

man took vocal exception to the shabbiness of my trunk, which was indeed held precariously together at that stage of my journey with indifferently knotted rope. As for canyons and claustrophobia—with the possible exception of Stockholm, I have never seen a city more beautiful than New York; while how it could be possible to feel enclosed, with straight streets showing a full expanse of sky at either end, I failed to understand.

I should doubt my ability to live in New York for more than a short time. The pace is too hot. I found I could manage on the very minimum of sleep, which was lucky, as I was trying to squeeze the maximum of business and pleasure within the limits of a single fortnight. I should like, even after this long time, to thank again all those people who spared neither pains nor time to make things easy and pleasant for me.

I have seldom felt more nervous than during the walk from the Gotham Hotel to the headquarters of the National Broadcasting Company in the Rockefeller Centre, more popularly known as Radio City. In every sense of the word I felt small. The prospect of showing off—of producing with a strange cast, in strange studios, with a technical set-up of which I was ignorant—with at least a share of the reputation of the B.B.C. at stake, was sufficiently alarming. Yet on that April morning it was impossible to feel depressed. Fifth Avenue glittered. Out of a clear blue sky the sunshine sparkled on the most polished motor-cars, the smartest and prettiest young women I have ever seen in my life; was reflected in the myriad windows of the Centre's skyscrapers, towering into the immensity of space. Lewis Titterton lost no time in putting me at my ease, and assuring me with the most flattering consideration that all the resources of N.B.C. were at my disposal for the *Lepanto* production. This was the more pleasing as these resources included the use of their Symphony Orchestra under Doctor Frank Black. Although the necessary music—taken from the Fourth Symphony of Tchaikovsky—was an integral part of the production, in England I had been compelled to make do with gramophone recordings. I will, however, admit that my first feelings of delight were considerably qualified by two factors that emerged: the first, that for a forty-five minute programme I could have no more than an hour and a quarter's rehearsal with the orchestra; the second, that there was no Dramatic Control Panel, and that therefore I would have to work with speakers and orchestra in the same vast studio. In both instances, I hasten to add, my fears were needless. Doctor Black proved not only a musician of parts, but a radio-craftsman of the greatest ability and the quickest intelligence. Added to his invaluable help was the fact that his orchestral players did not display that boredom with a programme-item not strictly labelled as concert-music, which is by no means unknown in the case

of their British opposite numbers. I was able to conceal my fears on the subject of studio "balance" long enough to realise that the programme engineer assigned to this particular job saw nothing out of the way difficult in achieving perfect audibility, although coping with no fewer than eleven separate microphones, the orchestra in full blast, and four separate voices. His success was, in fact, a remarkable feat. The actors—with of course a special microphone to themselves—were almost within *bâton* reach of Doctor Black, from whom they took their cues as if they had been instrumentalists. And I have never heard speech more perfectly audible or better balanced against an elaborate and heavily scored musical background.

*Lepanto* made for me, accordingly, a most stimulating and agreeable experience; the more so when I gathered that this type of programme was something of a novelty to the ears of the American listener, and read that it had been received not unflatteringly by the press. My second production—for the Columbia Workshop—was no less pleasant and interesting. But it was less nerve-racking, because it was considerably less formal and less complicated. Indeed, Irving Reiss, the former director of the Workshop, wired afterwards that in his opinion *Fours into Seven Won't Go* was too commonplace as material for the Workshop, though he was kind enough to approve the production as such. It was a simple enough "conversation-piece" by Commander Stephen King-Hall and myself, calling for little but intelligence on the part of the players. And I fear its selection was largely due to the simple fact that it was one of the few plays at my disposal timed to play for exactly half an hour. This tyranny of the stop-watch brooded grimly over the American radio scene. Having produced the play in England, I had no need to worry unduly about its timing. My friends of the Workshop however hardly managed to conceal their uneasiness, when at rehearsal I implied that other aspects of direction were more prominent in my mind.

Bill Robson—at this time Director of the Workshop—spared no trouble to help and encourage me. He produced a magnificent audition-list from which I could cast; (I promptly blotted my copy-book by choosing, in all good faith, an English actress resident in New York for the only American part in the play on the strength of her accent!); he gave me dinner in New York's Chinatown, where I was a little disillusioned by being given Indian tea; and he allocated his sister-in-law, a most delightful and decorative person, as my official guide, philosopher and friend. To Miss Betsy Tuthill my affectionate thanks for all the mistakes I was spared making; for many sins of omission that somehow never came to light!

There was, however, a moment in the course of this production for Columbia when my heart nearly failed me altogether. Robson, whose likeness to John Watt never failed slightly to surprise me, invited me

to watch one of his own transmissions. I was naturally delighted to accept. I turned up at the studio accordingly, having donned an aged dinner-jacket—the only evening clothes I had with me—none the better for having been at the bottom of a suit-case for nearly two months. Robson arrived, magnificent in tail-coat, white tie, and button-hole, and attended by a number of beautiful ladies, all befurred and bejewelled, who sat in the background of the listening-room with expressions of respectful interest upon their lovely faces. Clearly they had come to see a performance. And, when Robson took off his coat and proceeded to handle his production very much in the manner of an orchestral conductor, I realised that the performance was largely to be his. Actors, orchestra and effects were, of course, grouped about the single studio. There were no cue-lights. And—as I had seen previously in Germany—pace, cueing, and emphasis were all controlled through the glass panel by the producer's hands and facial expression. Robson's vitality and concentration were fascinating to watch. That it was possible for him to do what he did, and simultaneously to retain any sort of perspective of the performance as a whole, I still decline to believe. But I have discussed elsewhere the conflicting theories of single and multiple-studio production technique. What appalled me that evening in New York was the realisation that on the following evening some sort of "performance" would be expected from me. I was sufficiently aware of my limitations to know that in this field not only could I not hope to compete with Robson; I doubted my being able to put up a show at all.

My solution of the problem was not heroic. After all, I reminded myself a little dismally, three-quarters of effectiveness lies in contrast. So when Robson arrived to attend my production, bringing with him, as I had fearfully anticipated, another representative group of loveliness and fashion, he found that I had adapted to circumstances the main principle of Broadcasting House production: that of disassociation of the producer from his cast. I sat with my back to the glass panel of the listening-room, and—in default of cue-lights—gave the necessary indications to the cast by a single repeated gesture of one hand over my right shoulder. Nothing quite so ostentatiously undramatic had ever been attempted before by a radio-producer. And to judge by the comments I received afterwards—some of them printed—I might have been forgiven had I believed myself to have qualified to follow in the footsteps of Orson Welles.

Meanwhile, in the intervals of rehearsing, I had done my best to enjoy myself. I lunched at Sardi's—where the first thing that caught my eye was a caricature of my brother John. I had supper at "Twenty-One" with Syd Perelman, of the *New Yorker*, Hugh Williams and Margaret Vyner, and reminded Miss Tallulah Bankhead that we had met in London in the days of *The Green Hat*, which she was amiable



enough to remember. I danced in the Rainbow Room—and for anyone with a weakness for ballroom dancing the experience of waltzing, as it were in mid-air, high above that swinging kaleidoscope of city lights, must remain unforgettable. On my birthday I was awakened by a young woman singing "Happy Birthday to You . . ." *over the telephone*; while later in the day a typically charming gesture caused Robert Benchley to gather a party of friends in Hollywood and send me good wishes over Long Distance. I saw Frank Craven and Martha Scott in *Our Town*, and wept over the play as I have never before or since wept in a theatre. I laughed hugely at Ed Wynn, and George M. Cohan respectively; and found both *The Women* and the ultra-class-conscious revue *Pins and Needles* rather dull. I met Orson Welles, whose handshake I found flabby, and whose political prejudices I disliked heartily; and Geraldine Fitzgerald, who for all her good looks seemed too intelligent to be doomed to film-stardom. I renewed acquaintance with Sylvia Sydney at the Colony, and liked her more than ever. I saw Paul Draper dancing to the music of Scarlatti in the Persian Room, and was heartily condemned for finding the performance pretentious and boring. And I met—in a flower-shop on Madison Avenue—the most beautiful girl I ever saw in my life. . . .

It was with more than a little regret that I boarded the *Normandie* on the morning of May 4th—even though the passenger-list included Madeleine Carroll, the Lunts, Tommy Farr, Derek de Marney, and Koussevitzky. I had left Hollywood with the conviction that it was the one place in the world which I had visited, and which I could most easily bear never to see again. I left New York with the determination to return to it at the first opportunity. It is a determination I remain purposed to fulfil.\*

## CHAPTER XIV

### BROADCASTING IN WARTIME

THE morning of Friday, September 1st, 1939, found me in a rehearsal-room in a Mews off Marylebone High Street, extremely occupied with Mr. Somerset Maugham's play *The Circle*, which I was to produce for Television on the following Sunday. It was my first production of a full-length play in the new medium, and I was proportionately nervous and excited. But I fear that neither my mind, nor the minds of the excellent cast, were altogether on the considerable problems implied by work in front of a dummy television-camera. While it

\* I am in fact correcting the proofs of this book on my way thither.

may be true that few actors are politically-minded, I fancy that most people in the theatre had shared the renewed hopes and subsequent disappointments of the post-Munich period. And I doubt if any member of our little group had started *The Circle* rehearsals with much conviction of actually performing the play on September 3rd. None the less the shock was considerable when just about noon I was called to the telephone; informed that Alexandra Palace was closing down; and instructed that the B.B.C. "emergency period" had begun. I had just put down the receiver when an office messenger arrived with various "properties" for the play, including two tennis racquets and a number of balls. I have occasionally wondered what happened to those racquets and balls; if they were ever collected from Marylebone Mews; or if they remained there, forgotten relics of a dead world.

For me, as for many others connected with broadcasting, the announcement of the "emergency period" implied an immediate change of base. The B.B.C. was by no means unprepared for war, and elaborate and far-reaching plans had been laid accordingly. It was not altogether surprising that for the most part such plans were designed for a war quite different from that which fell upon us. The same was true of such more exalted institutions as the War Office and the French General Staff. Ours not to reason why. Ours but to disperse to live—on the assumption that London would, immediately after war was declared, be deluged with bombs, and broadcasting from metropolitan studios be rendered out of the question. Most of the Programme Division were therefore to be scattered about the country. And my own department—together with the recently recruited Repertory Company—was booked for Evesham: at that time only referred to under bated breath as "Hogsnorton."

The identity of "Hogsnorton" was veiled in official secrecy for quite a time. I take leave to doubt if it was ever kept secret from the enemy. One of our engineers told me that during the early summer of 1939 he had been in Berlin on a visit to a German Radio Exhibition. On asking for a sight of some new gadget he was informed with polite regret that it could not be produced for inspection, as all examples of it had been issued to the secret stations which had been prepared by the Germans for use in wartime.

"And, by the way," added the Reich official blandly, "how is your little secret hide-out in the Vale of Evesham getting along?"

On the Saturday morning therefore I locked up my Long Acre flat, bought a cat-basket for my protesting Siamese in a large department-store full of assistants amazed by the sight of a single customer, rather shamefacedly made a will—a formality I had hitherto neglected—and drove off down the Great West Road with a member of the Repertory who had been kind enough to offer me transport in her car.

I shall never forget the supremely ironic loveliness of that early autumn week-end: the beauty of that most typically English countryside between Reading and the Cotswolds. In that setting the prospect of war was as unthinkable as my own proceedings seemed quite unreal. And once again—as when I had left Warsaw in 1920—I experienced the humiliation of feeling a deserter. . . .

A local newspaper, referring not long ago to the period of B.B.C. occupation of Evesham, stated that the inhabitants saw the ultimate departure of my department not only without regret but with relief. I do not blame the local inhabitants. Billetees can never be popular. Billetees, whose work necessarily implies the keeping of irregular hours, and a demand for irregular meals, must be a considerable nuisance. But for the most part I fear that the people of Evesham made the worst of a bad job. They hardly tried to conceal their resentment at having their privacy infringed. They were quick to assume that the keeping of irregular hours was not the result of conditions of work, but of the irregular lives led by everyone connected with that home of original sin, the Theatre. They admitted us grudgingly to their homes. They made no attempt to admit us to their hearts. (I was turned away from my first billet on the ground that my Siamese cat was a dangerous wild animal. And to prevent him from languishing behind bars at the local vet's, I was constrained to rent a complete furnished house for the period of my sojourn.) Most of my colleagues could not afford such an extravagant and drastic solution to the continuing problem of the discomforts of their quasi-domestic backgrounds. And I fear that the relief which our departure after some five months afforded to the people of Evesham was shared by those who shook off its dust from their feet. I do not suppose that this isolationist attitude on the part of Evesham was unique, or peculiar to that town. It needed the blitz to destroy those psychological barriers of self-consciousness, and class-consciousness, which are common to all our countrymen. Danger and emergency proved wonderful levellers. It was depressing to notice how quickly the old barriers reappeared after the period of the great raids on London was over; how *camaraderie* and friendliness gave place once more to selfishness, snobbery, and bad manners. It is surely the grimmest and most sardonic commentary upon human nature that men and women refuse to see the value and virtue of behaving well, except in the shadow of imminent physical dissolution.

To speak honestly the months spent at Evesham were not happy ones. No doubt there were many admirable technical reasons for the choice of the place, and of the actual house in which our work was done. But they were not obvious to the harassed programme official, deafened by typewriters operated upon parquet floors; nor to the wild-eyed producer trying to cope with the peculiar acoustic qualities of meta-

morphosed stables and billiard-rooms, and the vagaries of hastily-wired and non-compensating mixing units.

Not that the house lacked its picturesque qualities. Originally the property of a former Pretender to the Throne of France, its walls were hung with deep blue liberally sown with *fleurs de lys*. Indeed, the royal device was everywhere: even on the bath-plugs and the weather-vane. There was a large and rambling garden, including a bear-pit; a drive lined with noble trees, appropriate rather to coaches and curricles than to the bicycles to which we had all willy-nilly to resort; and lawns with a superb prospect south and west, on which, one felt, peacocks should have paced and spread their tails, rather than actors frowning over scripts. It was, of course, before the days of the Home Guard, but a rumour of sabotage intended by—of all people—the I.R.A., constrained us to a system of nightly patrols of the grounds. Clad most uncomfortably in heavy mackintoshes and sou'westers, and armed with huge wooden clubs, which we could hardly lift, we would squelch through the shrubberies at intervals during the night. We must have been audible about a mile away, and in the face of any professional mischief-maker our armament would have been about as useful as an arquebus. But the proceedings encouraged us in the belief that life was both real and earnest, and gave us a very necessary reminder in our retreat that there was a war on, however "phony." While starlight over the river, and the displays of searchlights wheeling and flaring away to the north, combined with the days of an Indian summer to insist that all beauty had not died with the end of the old world.

Probably the general shake-up did us all quite a lot of good. But it was for a time distracting and for the most part comfortless. Distinguished officials found difficulty in remembering how to ride their bicycles, and occasionally fell off them. Less distinguished officials found that beards or Inverness capes looked unimpressive when awheel. A good many stenographers missed mother. Scripts went easily and frequently astray. Actors found themselves playing leading parts in two plays on the same night. Plays went from first read-through to microphone in a single day. One of my colleagues found himself quartered in a bird-farm, with wallabies at large in the garden. Another—his luck had always been proverbial—was quartered on an epicure with a French cook. We tried to maintain our *morale* by reminding ourselves that as we had been "reserved" our work must be of some importance to the national war-effort. We were not very successful.

The failure was principally due to the fact that during the first six weeks of the war any output of broadcast plays was considered superfluous. Tentative enquiry from headquarters elicited only the reply that programme-space might occasionally be forthcoming for a play

not lasting more than half an hour, "rather along Children's Hour lines." This was hardly encouraging to people who, if they were not labelled by others as *embusqués*, were inclined to affix the label to themselves. Speaking personally, to have been compelled to watch the Polish agony from such a very safe distance, in an environment so ostentatiously peaceful, and with next to nothing to do, remains as probably the most disagreeable experience I can remember.

However it is perhaps unreasonable to blame planners of broadcast programmes for a lack of imagination and sense of reality, which they shared with distinguished staff-officers and revered statesmen. The original error was comprehensible enough. Had the *blitz* opened with the war, and had the Germans attacked, or been attacked, elsewhere than in Poland, eight news-bulletins a day, interspersed with music for the most part on gramophone records, might well have proved to be just what the listener wanted. What was lacking was the will to put the machinery into reverse. There was something unsatisfactory, if not childish, in persisting to play "Casabianca" when the burning deck was conspicuous by its absence. The then Director of Programme Planning was a person of considerable academic attainments, and no small organising ability. He could—and did—point with pride to the way in which the Programme Divisional plans for the change-over from peace to war had operated smoothly "on the pulling-over of the lever." It was not his fault that the Germans refused to play their allotted parts. But both Sir Adrian Boult and I, not to mention others, believed that persistence with a plan of operations designed for a situation which had never materialised in fact, was ruining listeners' goodwill and the *morale* of our own staffs together. It was exasperating to be compelled to wait for an explosion of listener indignation in the press to confirm our point of view, before any appreciable change of attitude took place.

By mid-October however things had begun to straighten themselves out. The Repertory Company—with Gladys Young, Mary O'Farrell, and Laidman Brown already prominent in its ranks—had given a taste of its quality in a revival of *Chopin*, the radio-dramatic treatment of the Marie Wodjinska episode by Christopher Martin and Wilfrid Rooke Ley, the engineers putting in heroic work to adapt the lashed-up studio accommodation at Evesham to such a complex production. The Variety Department having been evacuated to the far west, I borrowed St. George's Hall, and so was enabled—with the distinguished help of Henry Ainley and Leslie Banks—to put the first wartime Shakespeare on the air: the Forum sequence from *Julius Caesar*; the Agincourt sequence from *King Henry V*; and the final act of *Othello*.

Meanwhile Laurence Gilliam, with characteristic energy and enthusiasm, was making sure that those responsible for Feature

Programmes should make the most of their new opportunities. Indeed the critic of *The Listener* in its issue of October 12th hailed *The Spirit of Poland* and *The Empire Answers* as "the first major effort of radio drama since the war." These were swiftly followed by that notable series *The Shadow of the Swastika*, which reconstructed in radio-dramatic form the rise of the Nazi power from its squalid and insignificant beginnings to the outbreak of the war. In this connection we were faced with a major problem in the casting of an actor to play Adolf Hitler. Recordings were made of several likely candidates for what must hold the palm as the least "sympathetic" of roles. And I remember a hideous afternoon when I spent two hours in a listening-room, my ears assailed alternately by Hitlers histrionic and Hitler real. At the close of that experience I felt that by far the best punishment for our arch-enemy, should he fall alive into our hands, would be to confine him in a small indifferently ventilated room, and play recordings of his own voice to him twenty-four hours a day. In the event Marius Goring played the part with marked ability, stamina, and success.

At the end of the year the department exchanged Evesham for Manchester. The agreeable welcome and hospitality of our colleagues of the North Region, who had to share office and studio accommodation with us, did much to mitigate the less pleasant aspects of this new evacuation. But I will not pretend that occasionally, under the influence of the murk and damp of the winter, some of us may not have thought a trifle wistfully of the Vale of Evesham, now that the effect of the manners of its inhabitants had been blurred by time.

Working conditions were certainly vastly improved by the change. The same was not true of the quasi-domestic background. I have to admit that I gave up any attempt to establish a private life, and lived in the hotel nearest to my office. I was more or less reconciled to this gloomy existence as it soon became a part of my routine to spend two nights a week travelling between Manchester and London. It was as a result of these journeys that I became involved in a newspaper correspondence concerning Manchester taxi-cabs. In fulfilment of the famous proverb, the Manchester taxi-driver was about three years in advance of his London opposite number in establishing as axiomatic that when meeting a train he would select fare and destination to suit his own convenience. Moved by indignation, less on my own account than on that of the unfortunate soldier on leave burdened with heavy kit, whom I saw continually left stranded, I addressed a letter on the subject to the *Manchester Guardian*, and was glad to achieve a measure of support for my complaint. On the other hand a correspondent was quick to point out to me that the North regards as "servility" what the South expects as "civility." While a second informed me, apparently with pride, that no less distinguished a legal figure than Lord Russell

of Killowen had come off worse than second-best in an argument with his Manchester cab-driver.

"A big powerful fellow like you," said the famous advocate, "ought not to be driving a cab. You ought to be doing something else!"

"What the hell is it to you what I'm doing?" was the retort. "Get into the cab and mind your own business!"

Over which incident I fear my sympathies are with the North.

By this time our programme assignments had not merely returned to normal. Broadcast drama was being called for in quantity greater than had ever been the case in time of peace. The black-out—nowhere I am convinced blacker than in Manchester!—difficulties of transport, and economic factors were all combining in favour of the theatre of the fireside and the loudspeaker. This period included the first broadcasts of Kipling's *Just So Stories*; Ronald Squire's *Ashenden* in the Somerset Maugham series of short stories; Leon Quartermaine in André Obey's *Noah*; and Belle Chrystall—who was later to become such an acquisition to the ranks of the Repertory in so many parts—in my own play *Africa Flight*. Occasional productions from St. George's Hall kept the hope alive that before very long the exiles might return to London for good. And then the "phoney war" ended literally with the biggest of bangs.

I was on short leave at the time when the first night-raids on London began. That week-end I had been down to the south coast with Charles Gardner and his recording-car, in the hope of seeing something of the Battle of Britain. There was something weird and unreal about the shuttered desolation of the little south-east coast towns; something unreal also about the one dog-fight we saw—so high above our heads that the sound of firing was barely audible. One machine went down, gliding seawards in a long curve, and we were glad to be assured in the next pub where we stopped for a drink that it had been a German; not altogether sorry either, I am afraid, when we were also assured that the pilot had been shot as he attempted to bail out. Gardner was going on to spend the week-end in the Thames Estuary, and had I gone with him I should have been in the front row for the first famous raid on the Docks and the East End. But I had been invited to stay with Monckton Hoffe in Sussex, and so missed what must have been an unforgettable experience. Not that I am likely to forget the second night of that visit to Copthorne. We had been sitting all the evening, talking rather disjointedly, all of us, I fancy, trying not to imagine too vividly the implications of the roar of bombers as they passed regularly over the cottage heading for London. Then, as we went up to bed, Monckton Hoffe twitched back one of the black-out curtains on the staircase, and I heard an exclamation quite out of keeping with his usual gentle calm. I joined him at the window and looked northward. The whole sky was a vivid salmon-pink deepening to an angry red,

against which the outlines of trees were silhouetted as if in a Doré illustration. Like most other people who witnessed that terrible glow at a distance, I could not but believe that all London was ablaze. . . .

Needless to say the opening of the *blitz* put an immediate end to any possibility of the return to London of the Manchester exiles. However, occasional productions were still handled in the capital so as to include in casts actors who could not be induced to make the tedious journey, and as long as St. George's Hall still stood undamaged. This was not to be for so very long. My final experience of London production, until in 1943 bombing-raids became a thing of the past, was the handling of an adaptation of a Michael Arlen short story in a studio in the sub-basement of Broadcasting House, with neither listening-room nor gramophone unit attached to it. The producer had perforce to share the studio with his actors, and to judge the result of their efforts through headphones. But in fact I remember the night of that transmission of *Three-Cornered Moon* less for its technical short-comings than for a slightly absurd personal experience. I had been dining with an American actress—a member of the cast—in the flat of a friend of hers near the Marble Arch. Both ladies were attractive and amusing, and I regret to confess that I did not watch the clock as attentively as one should previous to any broadcast. It was therefore with only about twenty minutes in hand that we prepared to set out for Broadcasting House. At that moment the nightly warning sounded, and almost simultaneously the guns opened up in no uncertain fashion. Neither bus nor taxi was available. The streets were uncomfortably bare as we began to walk. (We thought, reasonably enough, that if we got into the tube we might never get into a train; and that if we got as far as Oxford Circus, we might be prevented from leaving the shelter of the station.) About a third of the way along Wigmore Street the shrapnel began to patter down quite ostentatiously. I had a steel helmet. My companion had none. I offered it shamefacedly, feeling as if I were giving a bad imitation performance of Sir Walter Raleigh. The lady, in no wise to be outdone in gallantry however spurious, refused it. We then recovered our commonsense, ran until we were out of breath, and then took shelter under a tolerably solid-looking portico. Several bombs came down—one not so very far behind the Cumberland Hotel, which we had passed about five minutes earlier. In short the situation appeared most disagreeable—and time was getting uncomfortably short. It was evident that we must make another run for it, or miss the broadcast. I was carrying my companion's camel-hair coat, which seemed to me tiresomely heavy. Suddenly she began to grope in one of its deep inside pockets.

"This," she said rather breathlessly but firmly, "is what we both want."

Then in—thank heaven! deserted—Wigmore Street, West, might



have been seen the disgraceful spectacle of a B.B.C. executive and an actress, gulping neat gin by turns from the bottle. We got to Portland Place with about five minutes to spare, and replied almost airily to people who observed, with a flavour of gratifying anxiety, that it must have been quite lively in the streets. . . .

For the most part tales of the *blitz* exist, only to be capped, or as a warning to avoid the teller. In general those horrible nights of 1940-41 seemed to me to conform most exactly to the definition of modern war as "periods of excruciating boredom punctuated by moments of intense fear." But, though I experienced many air-raids in London, I was never as frightened during any of them as I was by the raid which hit Manchester on Christmas Eve 1941. A single fortunately-placed incendiary, aided by a temporary breakdown in the firefighting arrangements, resulted in the burning-out of four great warehouse blocks immediately facing our North Regional Offices in Manchester's Piccadilly. I happened to be in the office that night on Home Guard duty, and so achieved from the roof a perfect grand-stand view at close quarters of the biggest fire I have ever seen. It was hideously fascinating to watch the flames creep from floor to floor; lick out to fasten upon the window-curtains blowing outwards with the draught as the panes cracked in the heat, and so to bridge the narrow streets between the warehouses; finally to tower triumphantly into the sky in solid golden pillars shot with scarlet. Their light was so brilliant, that on our roof it would have been possible to read a newspaper with ease. Their heat was such as almost to scorch our faces across the width of the square. Yet at the same time below one's waist, where one was sheltered by the parapet, the December night wind chilled through battle-dress and overcoat. . . .

That raid resulted in what was certainly the strangest of my war-time broadcasting experiences. Most of our plays broadcast in Manchester were handled from a studio which had been rigged up in the secure depths below the Central Library. A performance of Edgar Wallace's *The Squeaker* had been scheduled for the night of Christmas Day. We discovered in the morning that the land-line between the Library and our Control Room had been put out of action by the raid, and that to effect immediate repair was not possible. London, who had heard something of the seriousness of the attack, rang up early to enquire whether we could produce, or if we needed some form of substitution. With more rashness than sense I assured headquarters that we could manage. We then turned to practical ways and means. And, as always in the face of any genuine emergency, the engineers responded magnificently.

In the basement of our offices was the strong-room of the bank which occupied the ground-floor. It, together with its adjacent passages, was used as an air-raid shelter. In the course of that Christmas Day,

the engineers succeeded in lashing-up gear which enabled the strong room to be used as a studio. They installed microphones and ran in lines. More important still from my point of view and infinitely more difficult—they managed to convey a mixing-unit to the basement, and fix it up in the passage outside the strong-room. But all of this took time. And it was with only forty-five minutes to go before the time of transmission that the emergency studio became available for rehearsing a play which was to run for just over an hour.

The Repertory Company proved, no less than the engineers, that they could rise to the occasion. The passage with the mixing-unit was so cold that I was compelled to wear a heavy fur coat ; and so narrow that there was no room for a chair, and I had to twist my knobs and flick my cue-lights standing up. But there was neither fluff nor hitch. And when, on subsequent occasions, I have grown anxious over shortness of rehearsal time, I remind myself that I have heard many performances worse than that of *The Squeaker* on that Christmas night.

The most distinguished contribution to radio drama during 1941 was without doubt Miss Clemence Dane's series *The Saviours*. These seven plays on a single theme, with the music specially composed for them by Richard Addinsell, dealt with the age-old English legend according to which—in the words of Layamon, writing in the thirteenth century—"whilom was a sage hight Merlin ; he said with words—his sayings were sooth—that an Arthur should yet come to help the English." In this series Miss Dane traced the recurrence of this theme through English history ; from the legendary tales of the coming of Merlin and the passing of Arthur, through the semi-legends of King Alfred and Robin Hood, to the historical and heroic figures of Queen Elizabeth, Essex, and Nelson, and finally to the Burial of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey at the close of the First German War. They made plays both moving and appropriate, broadcast during months, when, if ever, the English, sorely needing help, stood alone and stood fast.

Many people have pointed to the broadcast play as giving a new field of opportunity to the dramatic poet. I yield to none in my admiration of the work of Geoffrey Bridson, of Louis MacNeice, and of Edward Sackville-West : of *The Rescue*, *Aaron's Field*, *The March of the '45*, and *Christopher Columbus*. But, in spite of their appearance in print, *The Saviours* seem to me to have escaped the attention which was their due. Admittedly the series was uneven. They presented extremely difficult problems of production under war-time conditions, some of which I fear I failed to solve in spite of magnificent cooperation from Mr. Muir Matheson, who handled the orchestra throughout, from the Repertory Company, and from the acting of Marius Goring, Leon Quartermaine, and Fay Compton, not to mention

others. But for those who are interested in the art of dramatic poetry and the craft of writing for radio, I would recommend *England's Darling* and *The Unknown Warrior* as outstanding among broadcast plays.

It may be that I am prejudiced in their favour because, with all their alarms and excursions, I enjoyed their production tremendously. More important still, it gave me the opportunity to work closely with, and to gain the friendship of, Clemence Dane. I had been her sworn admirer since the original production of *A Bill of Divorcement*, and my three visits in a single week to her ill-starred *Will Shakespeare*, which remains to this day among my favourite plays. My admiration had only been increased when I first met her over a broadcast of the latter before the war. But it was over *The Saviours* that we got to know each other really well. And from the inception of the idea between courses at a luncheon, to the final performance on Armistice Day 1941, the mainspring of achievement was the blazing vitality and enthusiasm of the author. Myself I disliked nothing more thoroughly of the circumstances of war than the continual night-journeys between London and Manchester. Crowded blacked-out trains, usually overheated or freezingly cold; unexplained and inexplicable detours and stoppages; departure or arrival during a raid; the roaring of bombers' engines over packed platforms in darkness and rain; these things disquieted me profoundly. Clemence Dane was made of sterner stuff. The skies would fall before she failed to turn up for a rehearsal. I remember sitting one night in her flat in Tavistock Street, Covent Garden, whither she had invited me to hear one of the series read aloud just after she had written it. A considerable *blitz* developed. We were on the second floor, and the house is an old one. I knew there was a cellar below stairs, but I felt I could hardly suggest its advantages to a lady entirely absorbed in her reading. Before long "an incident" occurred in Bow Street—not more than a stone's throw away. The whole building rocked. I firmly expected the outside wall, at which I was gazing with acute concentration, to subside into a pile of unconsidered rubble. In fact I saw it bulge alarmingly. Winifred—it is impossible for me to go on thinking of her in formal terms—merely pitched her voice a tone or so higher, and continued to read. I will not pretend that I could have passed an examination on the content of that particular play. . . .

More than anyone else I know Winifred has a genius for friendship. To the most generous hospitality and the warmest of hearts she adds a capacity to draw out other people, particularly literary and dramatic celebrities, to display their most natural and their most attractive sides. Affectation and exhibitionism seem automatically to be discarded. And those who dismiss Noel Coward as brilliantly superficial, or heartlessly sophisticated, would, I feel, revise their attitude if they had

listened to him in Tavistock Street late at night discussing equally seriously the books of E. Nesbit—of which he has the most comprehensive and confounding knowledge—the future of the country, or his passion for the British Navy. There are few rooms of which I have such agreeable recollections as that sitting-room overlooking Covent Garden, in which the position of the furniture is so frequently and bewilderingly changed; with its massed books—especially the collected works of James Branch Cabell, for which Winifred and I share a now outmoded admiration, and whose puzzles and double meanings she continues to ravel out at odd spare moments; with the grand piano so often given up to the charm and brilliance of Richard Addinsell's playing and composition; with its walls lined with the sculpture and paintings, sidelines of the owner's astonishing vitality, which in other people would stand for an artistic output in themselves; with proof-sheets and typed sheets and sheets of manuscript lying here, there and everywhere; with Ben the terrier protesting *à haute voix* at the disturbing scent introduced by an owner of cats; and with Olwen Bowen, the devoted and indefatigable, producing everything at need from coffee to crayons, from an omelette to oil-paints. . . .

That spring of 1941 was further distinguished—from the broadcasting point of view—by Michael Arlen's first original radio-play, *Lady Here's a Flower*, delightfully acted by Ann Todd and Hugh Williams, and the first appearance of Constance Cummings at the microphone in *The White Cliffs of Dover*. For all its mixture of fustian and sentimentality Miss Duer Miller's poem had an irresistibly moving appeal about it at that particular time, when the possibility of "England finished and dead" lurked, carefully and consciously blanketed, at the back of all our minds. And the artistry and sincerity of Miss Cummings' performance—qualities to be displayed more worthily and to greater advantage later in *St. Joan* and *Antony and Cleopatra*—made of *The White Cliffs* one of the great popular successes of the year, which was to close with the first of that much-discussed sequence of plays *The Man Born to be King*.

I have written elsewhere of some of the technical aspects of these productions. Miss Sayers herself has described, vividly and wittily, the events which led up to them, and the singular gyrations of that singular body the Lord's Day Observance Society. I made her acquaintance for the first time over a Nativity Play—also written in contemporary idiom—and I must admit that my first reaction was one of considerable surprise. I had somehow got into my imagination that the creator of Lord Peter Wimsey must be in some sort a feminine counterpart of that nobleman. I expected to meet a sophisticated lady, garbed probably by Paquin or Molyneux, smoking fat Egyptian cigarettes, and displaying an exotic taste in wine and first editions. I expected to encounter an intelligence, informed and lively, but tinted

with the brilliance of the accomplished amateur. I could not have been more mistaken. As far as anything connected with her work is concerned Miss Sayers is professional of the professionals. She can tolerate anything but the shoddy or the slapdash. Of all the authors I have known she has the clearest, and the most justifiable, view of the proper respective spheres of author and producer, and of their respective limitations. She is authoritative, brisk, and positive. She is also—I hope she will forgive me—both domesticated and naive: domesticated in an intensely practical preoccupation with the running of her Essex home; naive in her charmingly child-like interest in all the details of “behind the scenes,” in her pleasure at establishing a personal relationship with members of her casts. I have never been paid a greater compliment, professionally speaking, than when she made it an absolute condition of the broadcasting of *The Man Born to be King* that I should be the producer of the series. I have never, been better pleased—agnostic though I am—than by the generally accepted opinion that the plays had proved successful in performance; particularly when that opinion was confirmed by subsequent broadcasts all over the world.

The year 1941 had turned out to be, from my point of view, something of a vintage year; 1942 was notable, from the same point of view, for Eric Linklater's arrival in the front rank of radio-dramatists. As far back as 1930 I had, in a piece called *Red Tabs* explored tentatively and immaturely the radio possibilities of a play whose core was discussion, rather than action or development of characterisation. Faulty though in many ways the practice had proved, I remained convinced that the theory was sound: that the microphone was the ideal medium for the dramatised discussion. As soon as I read *The Cornerstones* in print conviction hardened into certainty. The mutually agreeable environment of the Savile Club made the path to persuasion of Linklater comparatively smooth. And the successful production of *The Cornerstones*—a success shared by Robert Speaight, Valentine Dyall, Ivor Barnard, James McKechnie, Laidman Browne, John Robinson, and Jonathan Field—led directly to *The Raft* to *Socrates Asks Why*, to *Rabelais Replies* and to *The Great Ship* which achieved the unique distinction of being broadcast three times in the course of a single week.

In these plays Linklater achieved, in prose, and with perhaps greater precision, what Clemence Dane had essayed in the verse of *The Saviours*. Sound-effects were entirely, incidental music was largely, eschewed. Reliance was placed upon the use of words, and upon the rhythm of those words, as much for the settings and the atmosphere as for the arguments. The writer, confident in the mastery of his craft, demanded of actors and producers no more than intelligence of interpretation, and interesting and appropriate variety of *tempo*. Appeal

was made as much to the listener's head as to his heart. Outside of strong individual characterisation and small casts, no conscious effort was made to achieve easy listening. And it seemed that faith was abundantly justified.

The year 1943 saw the return of my department from Manchester to London. The suite of dramatic studios in Broadcasting House itself had been demolished in a raid, when one of the two direct hits received by the building wrecked the sixth and seventh floors inside the studio tower beyond possibility of temporary repair. St. George's Hall had been consumed by the flames which devoured the Queen's Hall. But the Monseigneur News Cinema beside Marble Arch, and the tiny Grafton Theatre in the Tottenham Court Road had been put into commission as dramatic studios, and it was from the former that *The Man Born to be King* and the even more ambitious radio-adaptation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* were broadcast.

It would be difficult to claim that *War and Peace* was an unqualified success. In this case desire outran performance—partly, no doubt, owing to that persistent bugbear, insufficiency of rehearsal time; but chiefly because of the vast size of the canvas. Infinite pains were taken over the adaptation by Walter Peacock and Barbara Burnham. The cast was distinguished and excellent—Celia Johnson's "Natasha" and Francis Lister's "Prince Andrew" being outstanding. But personally I remain unconvinced that it was possible satisfactorily to adapt a theme so vast, so sprawling, concerned so inevitably with an immense number of significant characters, to the limitations of microphone presentation. There were capital performances, and effective scenes. There was a general impression of grandeur. But there was also confusion, and an unavoidable absence of precision. None the less the attempt was well worth while. As in 1812 so in 1942 the defenders of Moscow were ranked with the storm-beaten ships of the Royal Navy, standing between a continental tyrant and the dominion of the world. The drawing of the parallel, the gesture to our Russian allies, were surely worth the making. If the broadcasting execution fell short, there was no other medium by means of which the attempt could be made. And that the gesture was appreciated in the Soviet Union was confirmed by a cable to the B.B.C. from the Union of Soviet Writers, signed by, among others, Alexei Tolstoy and Ilya Ehrenburg.

It was 1943 also which saw the birth of two dramatic series which speedily won for themselves an enviable popularity: enviable because their audiences, for the first time in the history of broadcasting, came ultimately to tread hard upon the heels of the best variety programmes in sheer quantity—if the statistics of Listener Research can be believed. It is surely superfluous to write further concerning "Saturday Night Theatre." It may, however, interest latecomers—and every theatre

has its latecomers—to know that the first play broadcast in the series was a Sayers short story adaptation, *The Man with No Face*; and those who doubt that senior members of the broadcasting hierarchy take any interest in individual programme items, that the first suggestion of placing a play regularly on Saturday night came from the, then, Controller of Programmes, B. E. Nicolls, while one of its most constant listeners and supporters has been the present Director-General.

"Appointment with Fear" however, owed everything to its creator and author, John Dickson Carr. Although an American citizen, his feeling for this country persuaded him not only to remain in England throughout the war, but also to exchange his proper craft of novel-writing for a B.B.C. job, in which he believed he could make some contribution to the war-effort. He had done script-writing for radio in the United States, and he suggested to me that there might be a place in English programmes for a series of thrillers handled in the American manner, with all the trimmings of atmospheric bass-voiced narrator, knife-chords and other specially composed musical effects, and a regular length of half an hour timed to the split second. My slight experience of American methods made the temptation to compete "on the home ground" irresistible. Constance Cummings agreed to help to launch the experiment. And, with invaluable assistance from Martyn Webster, I produced *Cabin B 13* on November 11th. At first the unabashed histrionism of the presentation proved something of a shock to the British domestic hearth. We were told that we would scarify the children. We were rebuked for treating horror with levity. As it proved, however, that Valentine Dyall as "The Man in Black" became a particular favourite among schoolboys, and that children seemed to beg to be allowed to stay up to hear the plays rather than have nightmares as the result of them, we were allowed to persist. A large number of grown-ups proved that they retained the lovable childishness of their youngers and betters. And "Appointment with Fear" became sufficiently a household phrase for the *Evening Standard*, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Mail* to make use of it on various occasions as a caption beneath a political cartoon.

A special production of Hardy's *Dynasts* in three parts during a single week in that October must be placed beside *War and Peace* as something of a splendid failure. There was fine speaking by Phyllis Neilson-Terry and Henry Ainley as the Spirits of the Years and of the Earth; a fine performance of "Napoleon" by Malcolm Keen. But, to be quite honest, as drama the whole thing never came alive, and proved—what I have always shamefacedly suspected—that this mighty work is only for the study. On the stage, in spite of Mr. Granville Barker's production ingenuities, it appeared as the merest skeleton. On the air at considerably greater length—though Mr. Herbert Farjeon of course abused us roundly for the necessary cuts—it proved a considerable bore

taken by and large. None the less I would maintain that this experiment also was worth making, if only to hear the magnificent Walcheren valedictory chorus, and the mounting threnody of Albuera, which almost succeeds in its challenge to Napier's immortal description of the advance of "that astonishing infantry," the fusiliers of Cole's brigade.

Meanwhile Feature Programmes had been proceeding from strength to strength. For the majority of these my responsibility was supervisory rather than immediate. The credit for their success should go primarily to Laurence Gilliam—in particular for his persistent advocacy of and belief in the idea of harnessing the technique of the Feature to the presentation of News: an idea which finally took concrete programme shape in War Report. But I had some personal share in the preparatory stages of the three notable programmes on the development of the Aircraft Industry, *The Air is Our Concern*, and in *Junction X*, which paid tribute to the wartime effort of British railways. Cecil McGivern, who had come to headquarters in London after some years in Newcastle with the North Regional staff, made his reputation as an outstanding script-writer-producer with his programmes dealing with the Royal Air Force: *Bomb-doors Open* and the *Battle of Britain*. With *The Air is Our Concern*—collaborating with Nigel Tangye—and *Junction X* that reputation was first confirmed and then enhanced. It was no surprise, though it was a great loss, to me when the film industry marked down his talent for its own.

In general, however, the Features producer was compelled very much to stand on his own feet, if only because of the circumstances of time and space. For him field-work was as essential as desk-work. If it was true that for the brilliant "How" series of programmes Stephen Potter required little but a room other than an office, pens, ink, paper, and the quickening society of Miss Joyce Grenfell, Francis Dillon had to travel Great Britain though to collect material for "Country Magazine"; Leonard Cottrell flew as far as Italy, before being laid low by sickness, in pursuit of the story of "Coastal Command" and *To See the Vacant Sea*; and Douglas Cleverdon was in Burma for the fall of Mandalay. The practical individualist won his spurs in such far-ranging activities. And the preservation for the giving of opportunity to such individualists was amply justified to a degree that can hardly have been imagined in the days of Sir John Reith, when he generously and wisely underwrote the rather distrusted Research Department and the early experimental Sieveking phase. It was an appropriate acknowledgment, as well as a matter of pride, to the Features staff when they were entrusted with the core of the special programme schedule for Victory Week: the dramatised tributes to His Majesty, to the Prime Minister, to the Services, the Merchant



Navy, and the People of Britain—*Their Finest Hour*. It was strange to read the billing of that series in the special Victory issue of the *Radio Times*, and to think back across five years to the Indian Summer of 1939, the green and pleasant lawns of Hogsnorton, and those endless, and mutually exasperating conversations with Laurence Gilliam, when we wondered—in the absence of programme assignments—how on earth we could justify our personal reservations as being essential to the effort of a country at war.

## CHAPTER XV

### STRICTLY PERSONAL

IN common, I imagine, with most people whose names for reasons good, bad and indifferent appear in the newspapers with some regularity, I receive a good many letters on subjects outside the range of my professional activities. There are, of course, the noble army of would-be authors who have in their time driven such eminent critics as Mr. St. John Ervine and Mr. Agate to protest that they are not unpaid literary agents. But a small inflow of unreadable novels, and unactable plays—even when written on circular pieces of cardboard, or in indecipherable handwriting—seems to be, though tiresome, all in the day's work. But I find myself consistently the object of enquiry under three heads :

How do I become a producer—or an actor ?

Why do you like Siamese cats rather than dogs ?

Why did you grow a beard ?

I feel that it may save a small quantity of time and paper, at a time when even these commodities are in short supply, to reply to these queries at rather greater length than can ever be possible in correspondence.

One impression seems invariably to be shared by those who yearn to break into the ranks of actors and producers : a belief that if only they possessed either money or " influence " the trick would be done. All such correspondents assure me that they have all the necessary qualifications. They need only a magic key to unlock the door of Opportunity. It is a curious and rather pathetic example of that modish contemporary disease, the enlarged Inferiority Complex. I would be the last person to deny the enormous part played by sheer luck in the attainment of success in the entertainment industry. The unexpected offer of a showy and foolproof part ; the unforeseen success of an experimental play ; the chance to take the place of a principal, stricken suddenly by appendicitis or the measles ; the encounter with manager or producer just at the decisive moment of casting—there are

few successful figures in the theatre or the cinema who have not owed something to these things. But it simply is not true that there is a royal road to one's name in lights by way of money or influence. An actress may buy a play and star herself. A producer may pull strings and achieve a particular assignment. Such short-cuts lead almost invariably into a *cul-de-sac*. Of such activities critics are contemptuous and the public is suspicious. What my correspondents need is not cash or "pull" but fire in their bellies: the fire of enthusiasm combined with determination that no amount of disappointment or ill-fortune can quench; enthusiasm that is sired by a genuine love of the theatre; determination based upon a belief in natural talent fortified by experience, and the hard work required for the acquisition of any professional technique. The mere putting of the question—except perhaps in the case of the very young—condemns the questioner to a verdict of unfitness. While it is true that the actor is no longer a rogue and a vagabond, his profession remains none the less a chancey affair; something of a gamble with life. The actor should, accordingly, possess something of the gambler's temperament. He must be prepared to take risks. He must enjoy the taking of those risks. He must be prepared to lose. He must be sure that he would prefer to remain an unsuccessful actor all his life, than to become, say, a secure and well-reputed schoolmaster or insurance-agent. Appreciation, for the most part ill-founded, of the glamour of the theatre business, together with an exhibitionist urge, however considerable and however loudly applauded by the local amateur dramatic society, are not adequate qualifications for entry into a field which of all others needs the professional approach.

Misunderstanding on the subject is comprehensible enough. Much acting, and almost all really good acting, looks so easy. Lord Reith is not the only intelligent man to have made the mistake of thinking that production consists simply of telling a few actors what to do—though even that part of production requires personality, tact, and knowledge beyond the ordinary. It may appear unimaginative and unkind to reply to the enthusiastic and yearning amateur of either sex that the only thing to do is somehow, anyhow, to go and act: to take the risk and chance the arm; to risk the loss of everything catered for in the schemes of Sir William Beveridge; and, more than likely, to come to grief as a result. Yet it is the only possible answer. The poet or the novelist must go and write; even if doing so means living in a garret on bread and cocoa. Similarly the actor must face the possibility of the dreary discomforts of touring, or the ill-paid drudgery of a fourth-rate repertory company. Amateur Dramatic Societies have never flourished in Britain as they flourish to-day. Their success is one of the healthiest signs in the whole theatre world. But the Amateur Societies are breeding-grounds for audiences rather than for

actors. They familiarise their members with plays and playing, but, with very occasional exceptions, they do not train them according to professional standards to become professional players or producers. Their members act for fun. That is the basis of the existence of such societies, and a very admirable and agreeable one it is, particularly in an era when exhibitionism of all kinds is encouraged, and sorely needs an outlet other than the political.

Nor is broadcasting, and certainly not very occasional broadcasting, to be considered as a side-entrance to the stage. The actor should master all mediums in which his craft can operate: stage, film, and broadcasting. The first is by far the most difficult and the most complex, and should be acquired first. It is true that there are exceptional individuals—Gladys Young and Lilian Harrison for example—with peculiar vocal quality, and a natural instinct for the microphone. But Miss Young was originally a stage actress. She has also been wise enough to resist the temptation to make of her radio triumphs a springboard from which to return to the theatre. It is true that broadcasting, like the cinema, should cast its net wider than the ranks of theatre artists for possible catches. But for successful dramatic interpretation the theatre remains the principal and proper source of supply.

I think that my weakness for cats goes so far back as the first occasion on which I first listened to my father reading aloud *The Cat that Walked by Himself*, my favourite of all the *Just So Stories*. It was immensely increased during the short period of my life when it was part of my daily task to read quantities of weekly and monthly magazines. Pipe and dog recurred with monotonous regularity as the indispensable "properties" of young men, who might be regarded by their girl-friends as heroes, but whom I found boring in almost exact proportion to their blatant respectability, and their vacuous expressions. I smoke a pipe with fair regularity. I felt that to keep a dog as well might be positively dangerous. Also I have lived in London all my life, and I have never been able to reconcile my more humane feelings to the spectacle of dogs tugging restlessly at their leads, dodging clumsy boots, bicycles, and motor-cars, and finding in lamp-posts what must surely be unsatisfactory substitutes for trees. The contrast between the cat—sleepy, self-assured, supercilious—*couchant* in the sunshine upon the wall he has made his own, and the semi-hysterical dog yapping frenziedly below, has always seemed to me pathetic, if not unpleasant. I will cheerfully admit that if you mean to make a friend of your pet, then the dog is your animal. But friendship makes heavy demands on both parties to it. In a large town, at any rate, I feel they are heavier than I can undertake. A cat does not need to be exercised. You need have no qualms of conscience about leaving

him to his own devices. He is decorative, clean, and self-sufficient. He can be amiable without becoming servile or losing his dignity. He is the ideal recipient of confidences. I think that on a desert island he would be my first choice as a companion.

I cannot go all the way with such enthusiasts as Mr. Michael Joseph, who regards a Siamese cat rather as an infinitely superior type of dog : as the ideal and beloved domestic companion. I find the Siamese simply the most attractive and intelligent breed of cat : individual, affectionate, yet consistently self-contained. His—or more usually her—voice is against him. Otherwise, except for a certain fussiness about his food, I find the Siamese faultless. I have become most attached to a succession of several Siamese. But they have never become an indispensable part of my life.

I confess I find it odd that there are plenty of people who look upon Siamese cats not only as not beautiful but even with apprehension and dislike. I do not mean people like my mother and Lord Roberts, who are simply allergic to all cats, even when they cannot see them. I have already referred to the Evesham household, whose view of a Siamese was that of a dangerous wild beast. And I remember an employee of the Gas Light and Coke Company, who, after enduring for about half an hour the unwinking stare of Hugo's blue eyes, remarked nervously that he had never seen a monkey that looked like that before ! For me the impression they make of beauty and grace is overwhelming. I shall not easily forget the first evening when I dined with Compton Mackenzie in his house upon Jethou in the Channel Islands. What might I feel justly have been termed "a pride" of Siamese sat round the walls. While on the table, Sylvia, matriarch of the clan, walked delicately as Agag among the plates and lighted candles. Her youngest daughter, Loulou, was to follow me to London a few weeks later, and live to a ripe old age surrounded by a large family—most of its members I regret to say, the fruit of irregular *liaisons*, in which she indulged with the appetite and arrogance of a Catherine of Russia, superbly careless of her lovers' low degrees. Semiramis—Loulou—Daffodil—Hugo—Rupert of Hentzau—I hope to look upon your like again some day, when civilisation has been restored, and it is possible to set dainty dishes of fish and liver and raw meat before your discriminating chocolate noses . . .

Finally—that beard. The motive behind its growing was simply vanity. Not that I believed it improved an appearance admittedly commonplace, although, after I had shaved it a number of kind friends expressed astonishment at finding that it had not concealed a receding chin. But it was irksome, upon being introduced to strangers, to find it assumed that my surname must imply the Christian name of John. And, as no actor can wear a beard except on the stage, I grew

a beard to avoid seeing the invariable expression of disappointment dawn upon faces—particularly the faces of young women—when I had to explain that I was not John Gielgud after all. When, after some years, the growing of beards tended to become fashionable at Broadcasting House, I felt that my beard had served its turn—the more so as it was beginning to grizzle. This visible emphasis upon middle age was not agreeable. I came to the conclusion that I could afford the extra minutes demanded each morning by clean shaving.

While I was writing this chapter I received a letter on a considerably more serious subject. "Do you not think," enquired a young enthusiast, "that the growing political consciousness of the theatre is a symptom of an increasingly serious attitude of mind on the part of the leaders of the entertainment industry, and that this should lead to great things?"

Truth to tell, I am not particularly aware of this growth. I doubt if the occasional letters from actors, which I read in the *New Statesman*, or even the more vigorous policy recently initiated by Actors Equity, mean that the theatre as a whole is really becoming politically conscious in a big way. The actor, certainly the good actor, is bound to be an individualist, and acting to be on the whole something of a "closed shop." The playing of stage kings and prime ministers no more qualifies actors for the political arena, than performances in *The Butterfly on the Wheel* or *Loyalties* qualifies them as barristers or solicitors. And it may be as well. For while it is possible that an active political consciousness in the theatre might lead to great things, I doubt if they would be acceptable things from the point of view of the general public.

In 1935 M. Komisarjevsky published a book on *The Theatre*. In connection with this question the preface to this book repays study. M. Komisarjevsky is a distinguished director, an established figure in the theatre, and an individual of unquestioned intelligence. But, from the political angle, how does he stand? In his view the theatre of ideas decayed with the naturalistic capitalist-supported period of the nineteenth century. "The socialist-democratic levelling of people resulted in the degeneration of individuals, of those most valuable specimens of humanity who alone lead the arts" . . . He goes on to quote Mussolini in affirming that "on a democratic basis men would be reduced to the level of animals, caring for one thing only to be fat and well fed." M. Komisarjevsky continues: "These revolutions—the revolutions led by Mustapha Kemal, Hitler and Mussolini—brought about a new wave of idealists in the theatre . . . the Soviets are limiting the scope of their theatre by making it a single class institution . . . the speeches of Hitler at Nürnberg show that the new Germany aims at creating a truly national and heroic theatre

of the People, and is aware of the important mission of the Stage in the life of a Nation, although within the limits of the political *credo* of a National-Socialist Government . . Dr. Goebbels wrote lately: The National-Socialist State brings art and the artist in Germany once again in living contact with the people and the nation. It has freed art from the over-accentuated individualism of the liberal era . . Since the rule of *fascismo* the theatre in Italy . . has improved idealistically and technically" . . .

It is too easy nowadays to fling the insult of "fascist" at any opinion differing from one's own. It is impossible to believe that the events of the last ten years have not considerably qualified M. Komisarjevsky's enthusiasm for certain by-products of the Third Reich and Mussolini's Italy. But it is perhaps not unfair to draw the moral that the artist should stick to the technique of his profession, and busy himself with the details of the world which he understands; that the artist, while always aware of the world in which he must live and move and have his being, should stand aloof from it; in brief, that art and politics do not really mix.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ROUND AND ABOUT TELEVISION

MY personal experience of television has been extremely limited. I was naturally interested in it from its first beginnings, for I was convinced that—Outside Broadcasts of notable news events excepted—television would find its greatest opportunity in the dramatic field. But for an unlucky bout of influenza I should have taken part in the first play ever televised in this country, when Lance Sieveking produced Pirandello's *Man with the Flower in His Mouth* by means of the Baird system—rather curiously in a studio a stone's throw from my Long Acre flat. I was concerned intermittently with the earliest experimental transmissions from the basement of Broadcasting House, of which I most clearly remember the engaging antics of a performing sea-lion and his exceedingly "fish-like smell" at close quarters. But it was only in February 1937 that the Postmaster-General recommended the termination of the experimental period, and the adoption of a single set of standards—those employed in the Marconi-E.M.I. system—for transmissions of a regular service from Alexandra Palace.

Test programmes, which used two systems alternately, had begun in August 1936 from Alexandra Palace, and, largely owing to considerations inseparable from physical distance, those concerned with television had rapidly established a considerable self-contained isolation

as far as their colleagues of sound-broadcasting were concerned. Many indeed of the television staff were recruited from outside Broadcasting House, and had served no broadcasting apprenticeship at all. Some of us felt, I fear, that the news-value of the "new thing," and the entirely comprehensible enthusiasm of the manufacturers of receiving-sets, combined to give the television people more than their share of publicity and credit. This was not fair. I doubt if it has ever been appreciated sufficiently just how difficult and trying the circumstances were, which had to be surmounted by Gerald Cock and his devoted staff. The actual feasibility of programme execution was the last thing considered in the establishment of a regular service. Studio space and rehearsal facilities were alike fantastically inadequate. Nothing short of blazing enthusiasm, and a consistent refusal to admit that anything could be impossible, could have achieved the results which by the beginning of the war had given to Great Britain the acknowledged lead in the television field.

Sir Cecil Graves had always considered that the isolation of Alexandra Palace from Broadcasting House was regrettable, and that it should not be established as permanent. I found him sympathetic accordingly to my suggestion that I should be seconded to television, for the purpose of learning the elements of a new technique of production. I went to Alexandra Palace accordingly in the late spring of 1939, in the capacity of an individual producer, and, in normal circumstances, would have remained there for the rest of the year. As things turned out my term of probation was reduced to four months, during which I handled only two plays before the cameras. My first full-length production was actually scheduled for Sunday, September 3rd, 1939. I have not given up hope that one day it may reach the screen.

My impressions therefore must be read as being essentially those of an observer and a tyro, not of an expert. None the less, with the re-establishment of the service they may have a certain value. I doubt if even the most fanatical of the television enthusiasts would pretend that a good many mistakes were not made. I hope they will agree that it would be a good thing if such mistakes were not repeated.

In the first place then, I felt immediately—and feel now—that far more was being bitten off than could possibly be chewed. The B.B.C. handbook of 1938 proclaimed with pride that the television service provided something for everybody; pointed to two and a half hours of "live" material, as distinct from film, being available every week-day, together with an hour on Sundays; listed music, ballet, revue, art exhibitions, fashion parades, News celebrities in their proper persons, variety acts, tap-dancing, drama, and even grand opera, among television programme items. All this apart from mobile television, which was appropriately and notably inaugurated on Coronation Day, May 12th. The list is impressive. The ingenuity and

vitality poured into the execution of the programme items were as terrific as they were praiseworthy. None the less I could not resist an uneasy conviction that much of this vitality and ingenuity was wasted; less because the audience was admittedly a limited one, than because lack of space, of gear, and of rehearsal time, made true precision of handling a sheer impossibility. Let me quote again from the Year Book:

"Every hour of screen time involves at least six or seven hours of rehearsal, so rehearsals go on from morning to night—in studios at Broadcasting House and Maida Vale, in music-rooms, in odd corners of Alexandra Palace, *and even in the homes of producers*. Camera rehearsals, which are the only dress rehearsals—and, *it might be added, the only useful rehearsals, once the preliminary read-through period has been passed—are just possible for an hour or two immediately preceding transmission* . . . so the early rehearsals call for much imagination on the part of the producer, who must visualise his camera positions and communicate his intentions to his artists in an environment which would be more suitable for a *séance* or an afternoon tea-party."

The italics are mine. They should not be necessary to emphasise the undoubted fact that while a producer should certainly be expected to possess and required to exercise imagination, he can hardly carry out a genuinely professional job by means of that faculty alone.

My unqualified admiration went to D. H. Munro, the Productions Manager, in whose hands was all the elaborate machinery of presentation. Nothing—from the working out of each day's "running order" to the building of an elaborate "set," from designing a caption card to the allocation of dressing-rooms to temperamental artists, found him at a loss. He knew what he worked for and loved, in the spirit of Cromwell's soldiery. He was as cheerful as he was indefatigable. That same spirit illumined the work of the producers. Royston Morley and More O'Ferrall, Stephen Thomas and Dallas Bower—the latter to an outstandingly ambitious degree—made bricks without straw, achieved production almost without rehearsal, after a fashion that was both bewildering and inspiring. I looked forward to the time when I should have achieved sufficient experience of the new craft to be able to attempt competition with their efforts. It seems ungracious even to suggest that it would have been for the good, had less running been tried before walking had been mastered.

The truth was that the medium was still very imperfect; that the targets to be aimed at had been insufficiently defined. The whole business had gone off at too great a pace, and in too exciting an atmosphere. I know of nothing more stimulating—for all its appalling stuffiness—than the control-room of a television studio. Sitting at a desk looking down on the studio, the producer has before him a fantastic Wellsian mechanical contraption, yielding sound and pictures



together. Six feet away from him are two reception screens: one shows the picture being radiated; the other a picture which can be prepared in advance, to which the mixing engineer will "fade"—to use the normal sound-broadcasting term—when the moment comes for shifting scene and sequence. Below him a flood of brilliant light pours down into the studio from lamps combined in groups, and controlled from the producer's switch-board. Down on the floor two or three grey-painted Emitron cameras squat and focus, or glide to and fro on a "dolly" like surrealist giant grasshoppers, while the microphone is swung overhead on its lazy-arm, in pursuit of scene after scene, as though it were an outsize in fishing-rods. Camera-men and sound-men all wear headphones, through which the producer can communicate with them even during transmission. Darkness and blinding light, mechanisms and men, combine to produce a picture astonishing and unique.

It would have needed an iron hand upon the controls, the coolest of brains, a considerable period devoted to closed-circuit experiments, to prevent producers from being carried away by the stimulus, the excitement, the tempting possibilities inherent in the television machinery. But the experimental period was not forthcoming, and Gerald Cock was not the man to apply a brake. On the contrary. Everything seemed united to further more and more ambitious projects. So complete ballets, and elaborate productions of full-length costume plays, were projected upon screens that could not hold their detail, under conditions in which perfected performances could not be imagined. Meanwhile, and by comparison, it seemed dull, and almost cowardly for me to think by preference of simple one-act plays, which for choice should have been given several performances in the course of the week.

It was, I suppose, natural enough that at Alexandra Palace I should find that emphasis in production was on vision at the expense of sound. After all, it needed the arrival of an Orson Welles—a director of inherent imagination and much broadcasting experience—to introduce in *Citizen Kane* a few commonplace tricks of sound-broadcasting, which in a film appeared of brilliant originality. In general, my own experience has confirmed a suspicion that for the most part the microphone is treated in a film-studio as little more than a necessary evil. Similarly, television producers, of whom several had had film training, threw aside as altogether unimportant most of the experience of pure-microphone capacities which had been accumulated at Savoy Hill and in Broadcasting House. Television production seemed to me to be panting breathlessly in the wake of the films, instead of basing its practice on the sounder theory that vision should serve to emphasise, to clarify, to embellish, where sound alone was thin, obscure, or dull. Television cannot, and

should not try to, substitute for the film. Its product is "live," not canned. It cannot be "shot" again and again until perfection is achieved by an average of mathematical progression. Neither television-camera nor reception-screen in early days at Alexandra Palace was yet sufficiently a weapon of precision to undertake the responsibility of material with appeal primarily pictorial.

What was lacking, of course, was what is always lacking in the world of radio: time to think things out. I doubt if anybody ever formulated in 1939, or could formulate now, exactly what a "television-piece" should be; just wherein it differed or should differ from the products of theatre and cinema. In practice, what happened most often was that stage-plays were photographed after a more or less specially adapted film manner. Considering the circumstances and the handicaps, the results were remarkable. But, given those circumstances, any results would have been remarkable. That is, I fear, the brutal truth. This elaborate and exciting mechanical medium was there. It clamoured for use. Any use of it was wildly propagandised, and extravagantly praised. I can find little evidence that any very serious consideration was given to the problem of the subjects which it could handle in a way superior to the handling already available in the shape of other interpretative mediums.

I may easily be accused of regarding television with a jaundiced eye, since I have admitted that with its perfecting, the future of the radio play, as I know it and have helped to develop it, disappears. Add sound-track to the camera, and the silent film becomes merely a museum-piece. Add viewing to the microphone, and the radio play must follow the same road into limbo. So I shall not complain unduly if my point of view is dismissed as being inevitably prejudiced. None the less, I continue to believe that it is a mistake to be so fascinated by the means at one's disposal, that the end becomes in comparison unimportant. To that fascination people working in the atmosphere of Alexandra Palace were extremely prone to succumb.

This is by no means an implication that I have no belief in a future for television. I have every belief in it. To begin with, it is bound to come. When all the secrets of the war can be unveiled and applied to peacetime uses, we may well find that it has come already. It would be more than foolish to disregard its possibilities, just because in its earliest stages it was treated more as "stunt" than as an art, or even as serious craft. But sound-broadcasting did not escape its swaddling bands until it was realised that the microphone was something more than a cheap and easy eavesdropper. Television will not grow up until the camera is used more subtly than as a method of peering through keyholes at what is happening in the world. To photograph and radiate what is going on—even if what is going on happens to be a theatre-piece or a film—will not make television

drama. What will make such a thing remains to be discovered. That there is going to be such a thing can be taken for granted.

At present it is the handicaps which impress the novice most forcibly. He watches a medium which is without the support of the age-old traditions of the theatre; which cannot rely on the imagination of the audience for assistance—as the radio play has trained its listeners to do; which is cluttered up with much of the mechanism of the film-studio without having the advantage given in the cinema by the possibility of unlimited “retakes.” He is faced by the problems inseparable from make-up, from lighting, from costumes, from settings. For the basis of his work he must be altogether at the mercy, and depend upon the goodwill, of his engineers. If producing a radio play can be compared to the holding of a flash of lightning by the tail, the production of a television play is akin to attempting to hold a comet between one’s knees.

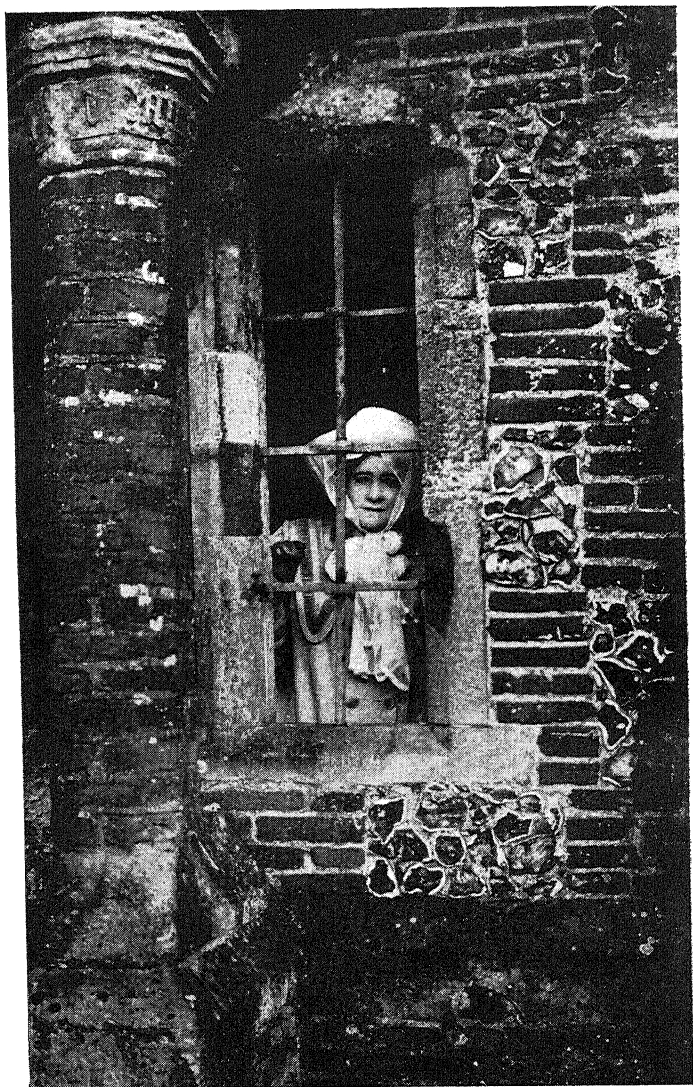
The same thing is true for actors. They must perform under all the limitations of film-studio conditions: unnatural make-up, positions conditioned primarily by camera angles, and glaring lights. Yet they must play as if to a live audience—though without the stimulus of that audience—not in unrelated scenes, with pauses for rest and refreshment, but from the beginning of a piece to its end.

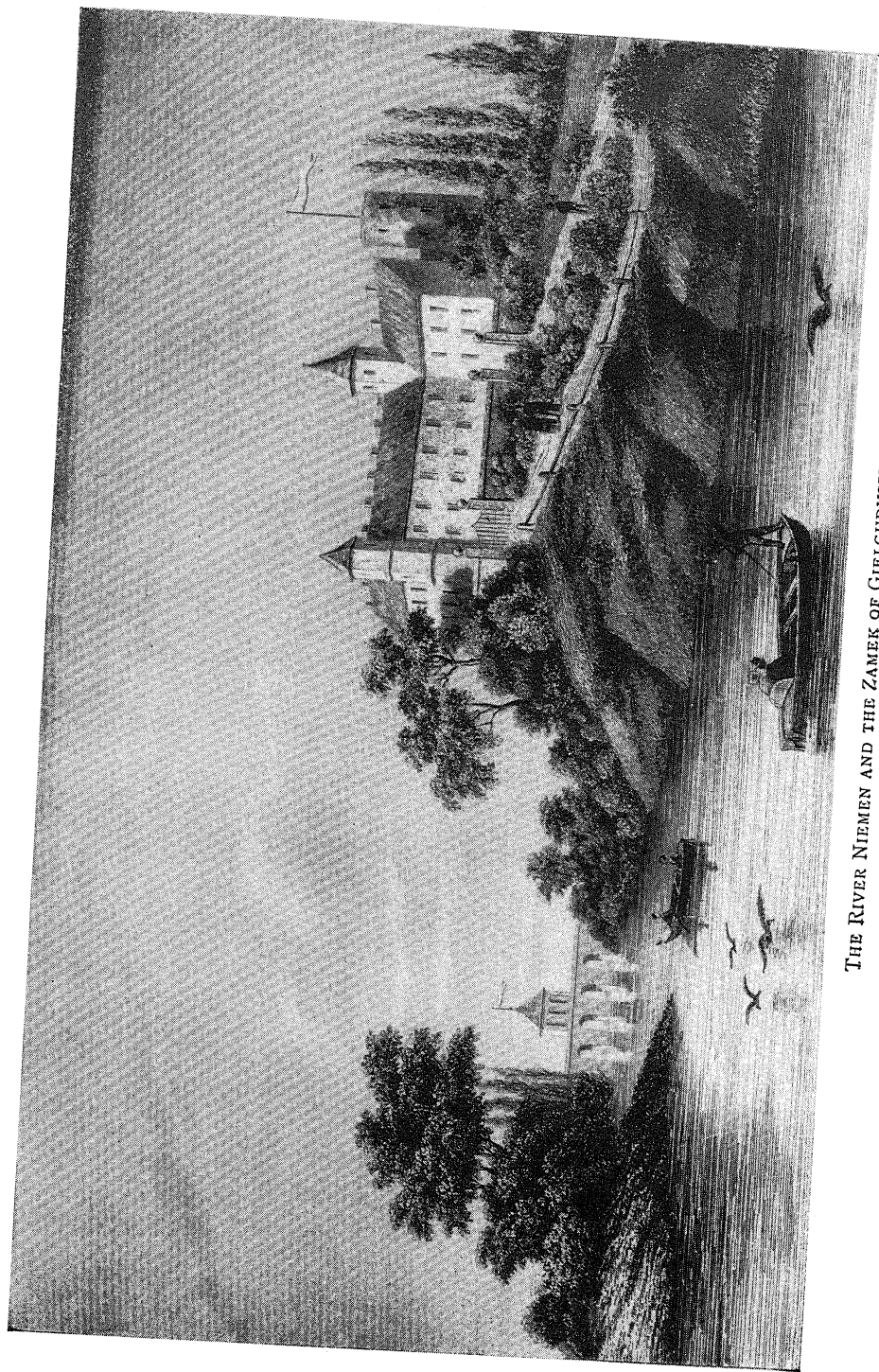
It may be—I suggest it only with the diffidence of inexperience—that the solution lies in the realisation that in Television the camera may not be the most essential cog in the machinery: an important cog, a vital cog, but for all that only one cog among others. I am inclined to believe that the Television producer of the future will have, above all else, to be a first-rate *chef*. He will use camera and microphone, “live” scenes and filmed scenes, studio-sets and “actuality” shots, in sequences and mixtures most cunningly contrived. I do not imagine that I was the only producer to experiment with “library” film-sequences to link scenes played in the studio. I made use of this mixture, crudely and imperfectly needless to say, when handling a play of my own, *Ending It*, at Alexandra Palace in the summer of 1939. I found immediately that it enabled me to get the play, as it were, out of leading strings; to give it a smoothness of flow, a mobility such as had been added to the radio play when multiple-studio technique was applied for the first time.

In short, I would suggest that the key to the problem of Television production is to act on the conviction that Television’s business is to give sight to the listener, *where sight is either essential or helpful*. It is not Television’s business to radiate photographs. *Television should be an improved method of broadcasting*. And it has been proved, I think, that there is a good deal more in broadcasting than enabling the listener to hear, say, the actual sound of Niagara Falls. There will naturally be a place for the televising of the great event at the



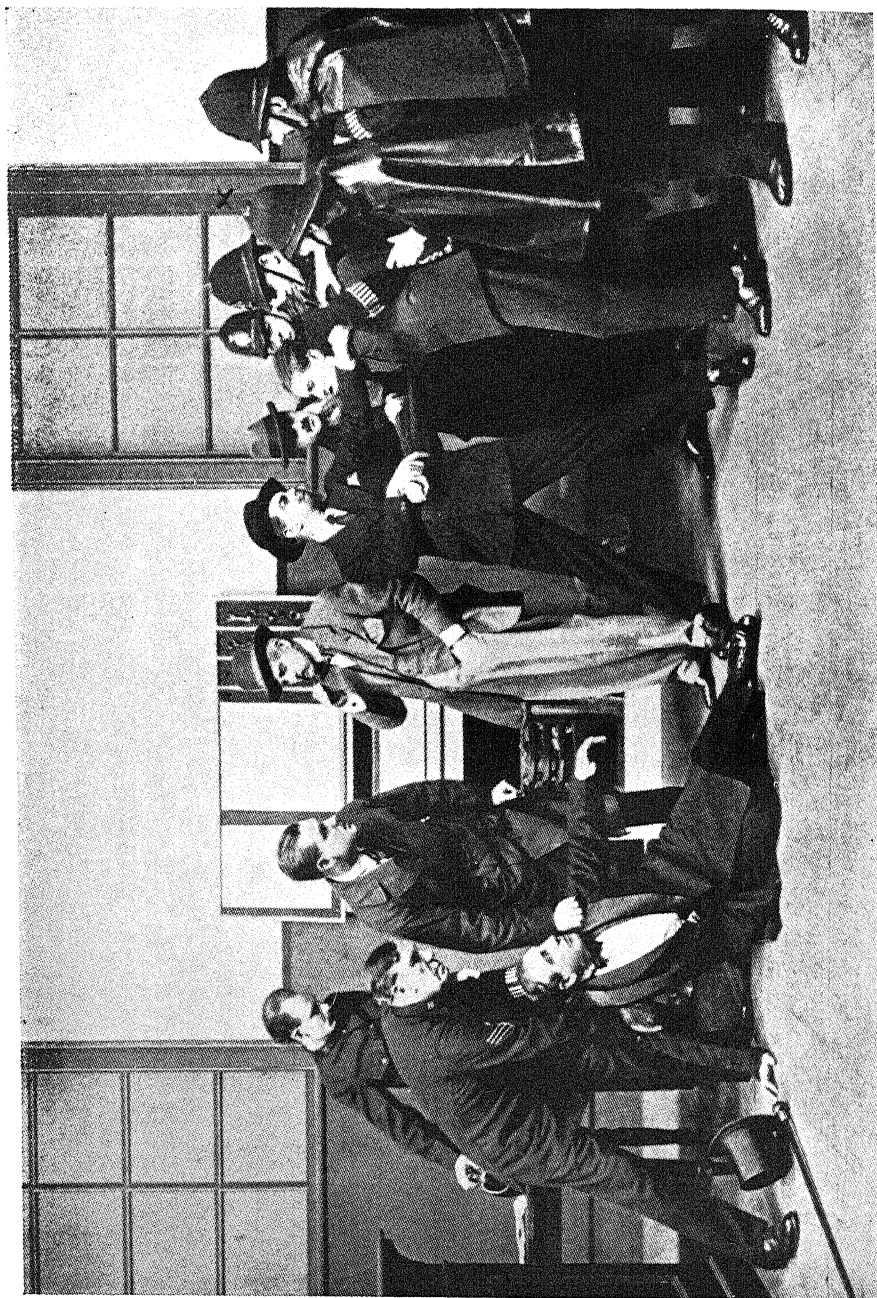
HOLLYWOOD—SHIRLEY ROSS AND V.G.



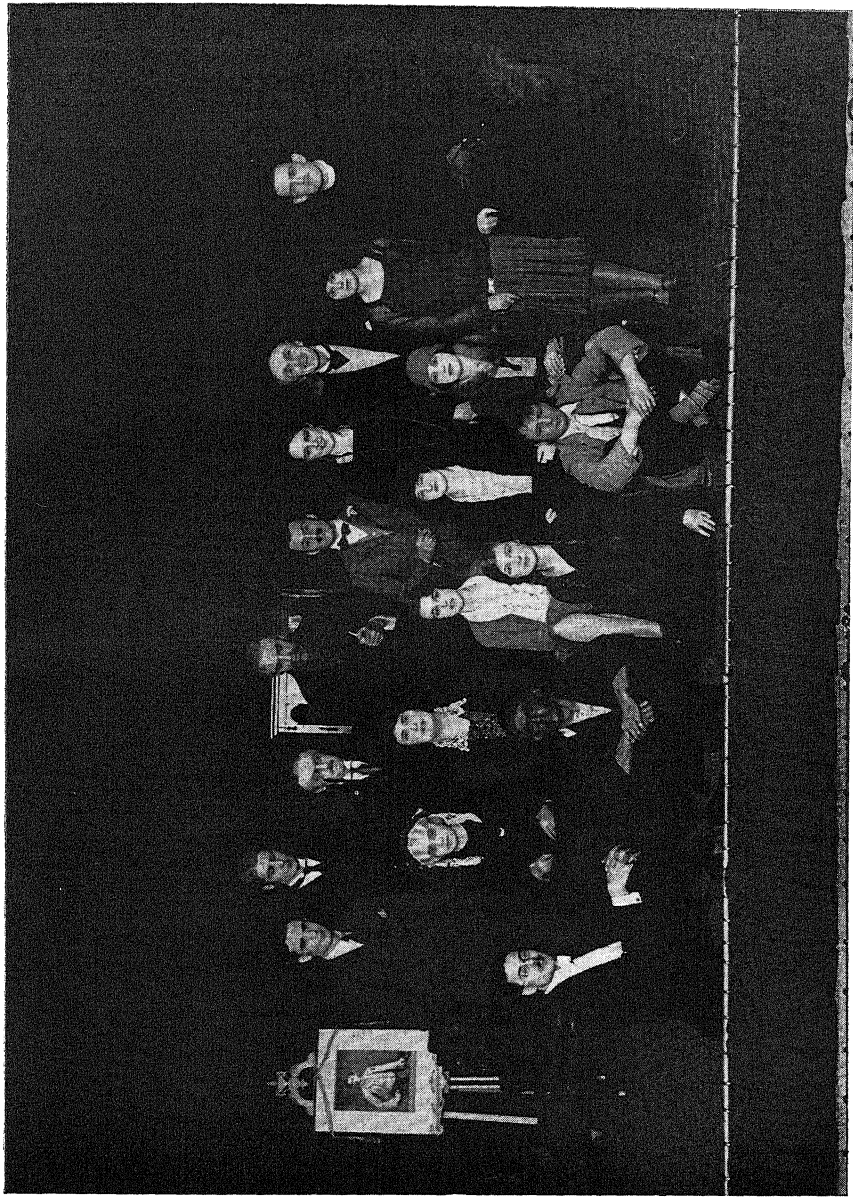


THE RIVER NIEMEN AND THE ZAMEK OF GIELGUDYSZKY.





'THE RINGER'—WYNDHAM'S THEATRE, 1926.  
*Franklyn Dyall, Nigel Bruce, Leslie Faber, Leslie Banks. (V.G. marked with X !)*

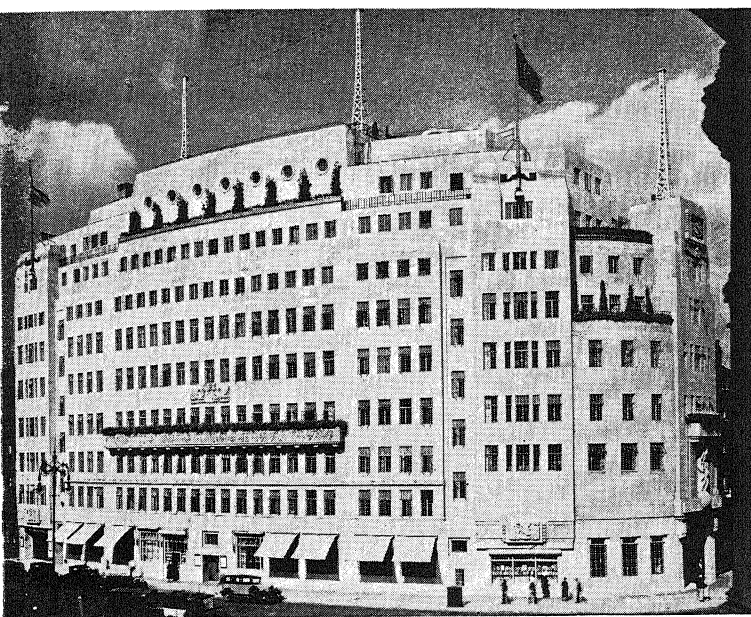


'TILLY OF BLOOMSBURY'—B.B.C. AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY, 1923.





‘THE END OF SAVOY HILL.’  
(The last programme broadcast from Savoy Hill.) V.G., Lance Sieveking and D. H. Muir.

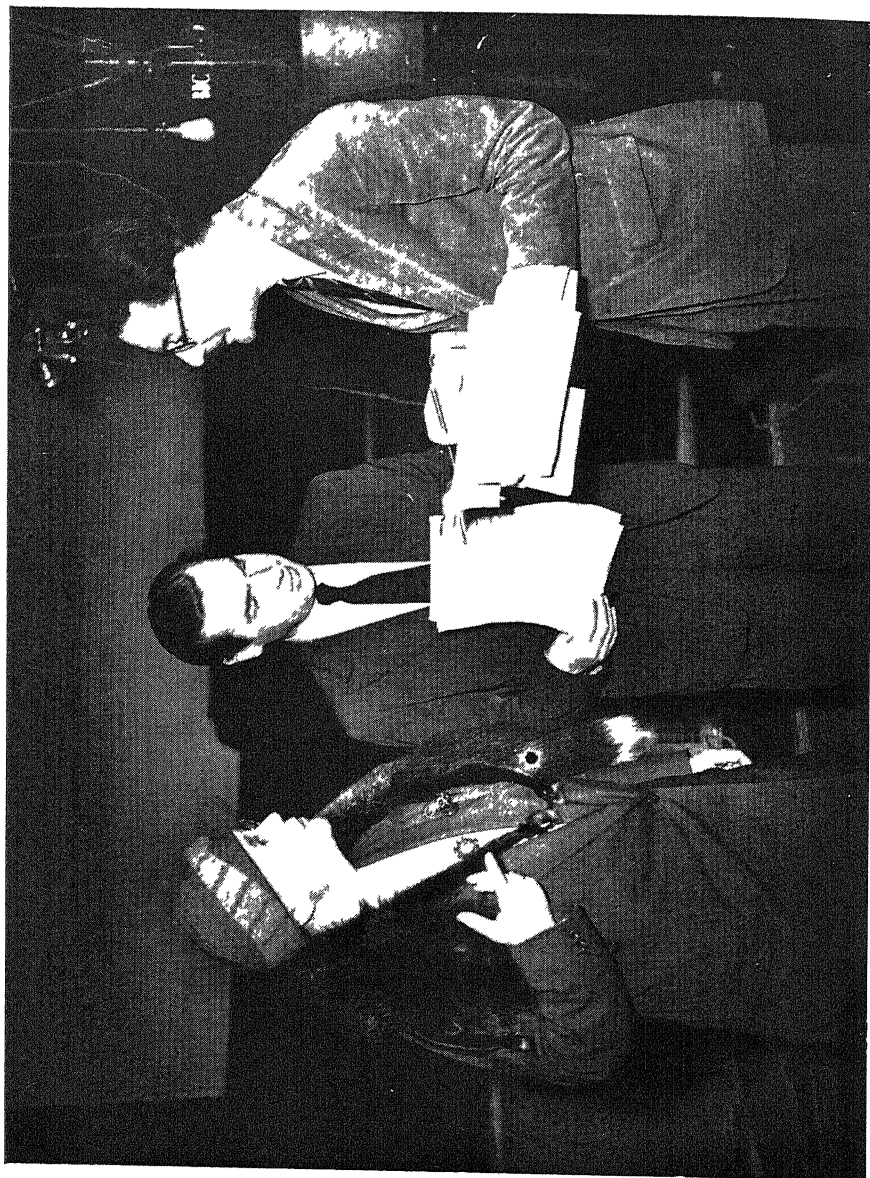


BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1937.



THE DRAMATIC CONTROL PANEL—BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1932.

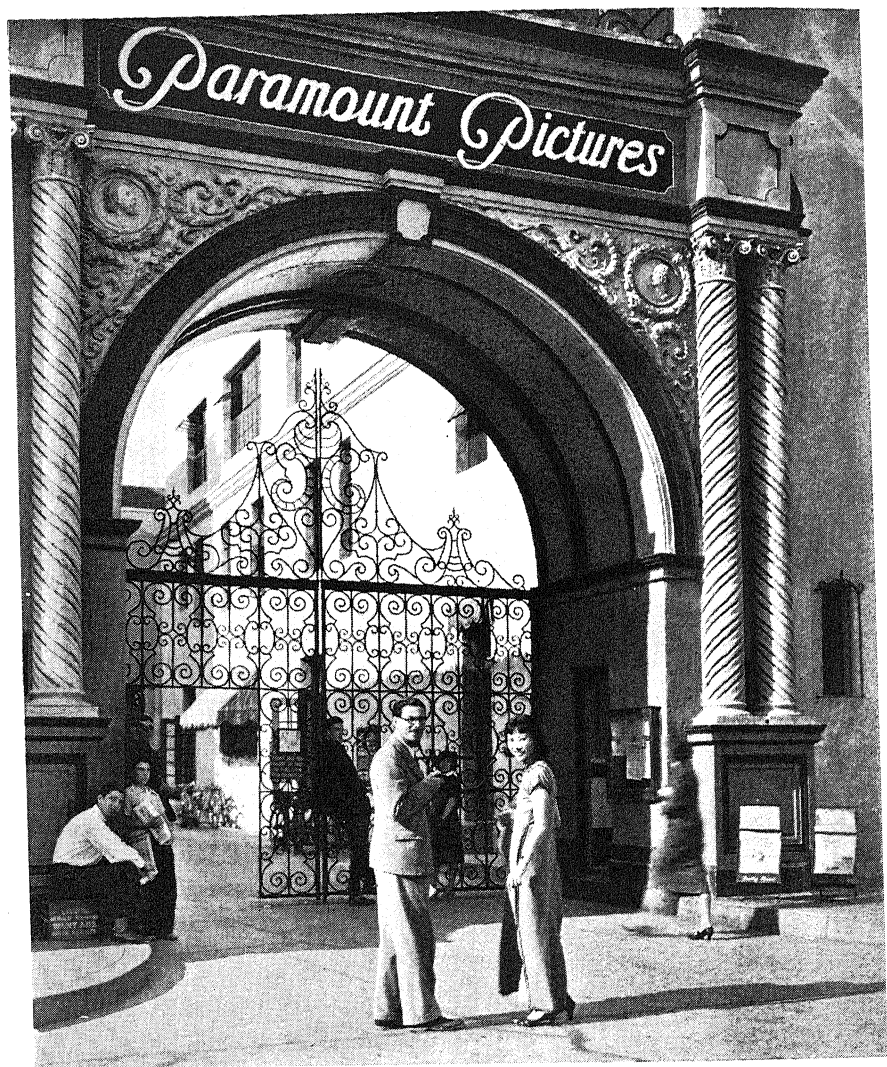
'THE MAN BORN TO BE KING'  
*Dorothy L. Sayers, Robert Speaight, V G*





ERIC MASCHWITZ and V G. BUDAPEST, 1936



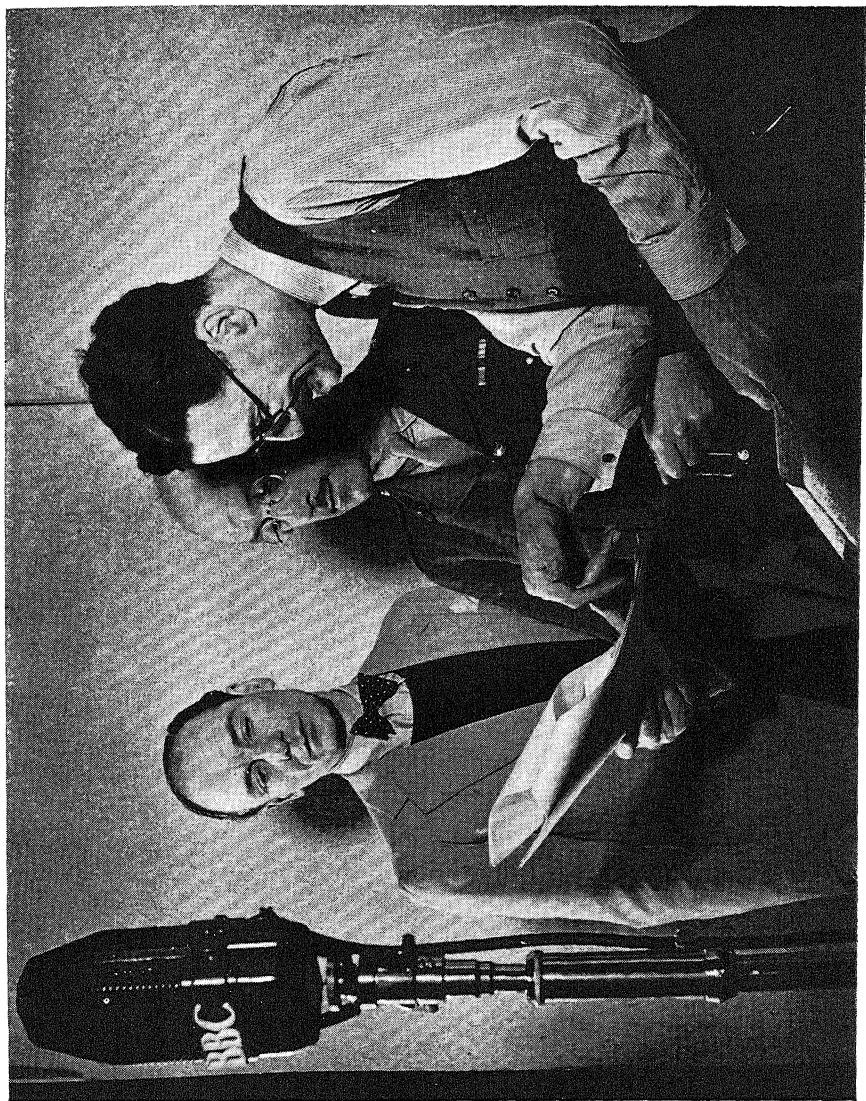




THE PARAMOUNT ARMOURY.

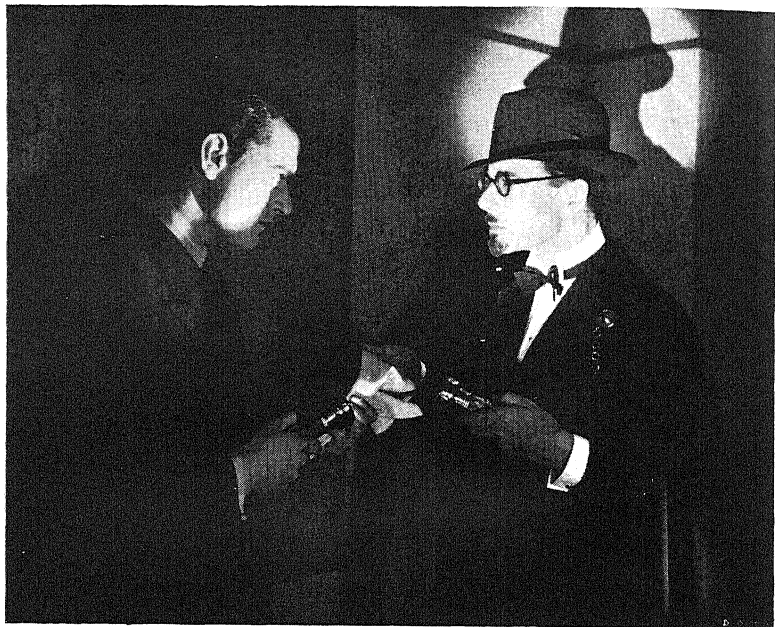


BLITZ AT BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1941.

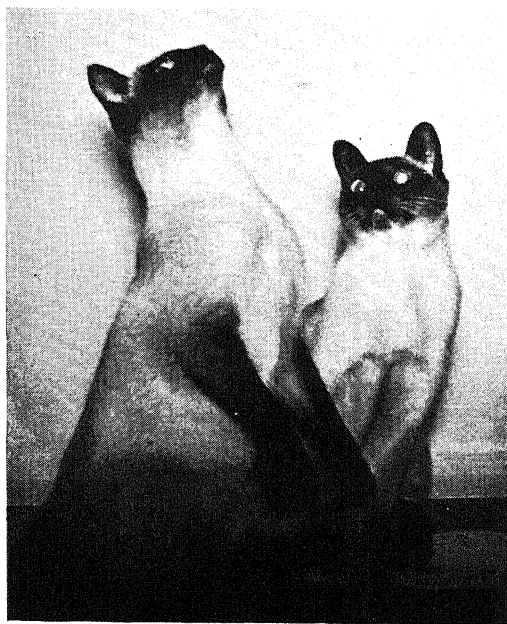


'THE GREAT SHIP'—BROADCASTING HOUSE, 1943.  
*John Gielgud, Eric Lincolner and V.G.*





'DEATH AT BROADCASTING HOUSE.'  
*Jack Hawkins and V.G.*



'HUGO' AND 'RUPERT OF HENTZAU.'



TELEVISION—ALEXANDRA PALACE, 1939.  
(Joan Marion and John Robinson in 'Ending It.' Written and produced by V.G.)



WARSAW, 1945 THE ROYAL PALACE

moment when it happens, of the notable personality; of the natural phenomenon. But these things, like Outside Broadcasts, are—from the point of view of the expert and the producer—elementary, no matter how consistent their popularity.

Nor is the problem entirely one for the producer. It will be one for the writer. If the new medium is to achieve genuine prestige and real success, it will depend upon writers who can think in its special terms, even as the playwright thinks of the theatre, and the scenarist of the cinema screen. Adaptation will not be enough. The ideal story told by Television should probably be incapable of true telling in the terms of novel, play, or film.

None the less, let us not forget the pioneers. When the legendary New Zealander contemplates the ruins of London Bridge in all the pride of the Brave New World, I hope that one of his companions may regard—with a mingling of awe flavoured by regret—the ruins of Alexandra Palace, remembering that along those bare-boarded corridors, flanked by moth-eaten stuffed wild animals and improbable groups of statuary, once hurried the men and women whose efforts flung the first regular Television programmes upon the English air.

## CHAPTER XVII

### POLAND—1945

I HAD hardly written this last chapter—which I had designed originally as the appropriate close for this book, when I received an invitation from the Polish Government to pay a brief visit to the New Poland. The party was to consist of “representatives of various aspects of British Culture.” And though I had some difficulty in recognising myself under such a label, the opportunity was not one to be missed. Both the British Broadcasting Corporation and His Majesty’s Foreign Office proved sympathetic. Transport Command of the Royal Air Force provided Dakotas for the journey. And hideously early in the morning of September 9th a motor-car took me to Hendon aerodrome on the first lap of my first trip abroad since midsummer of 1939. My feelings were most curiously mixed. I love foreign travel, and I love Poland—and I was to travel to Poland. I have much affection for my relations—and I was to see my aunt and my cousins in Cracow, whom I had not seen for the best part of ten years, and of whom I had had little news since the war. I detest flying—for the simple reason that I am always scared in an aeroplane, and have difficulty in disguising the fact—and I was to fly half across Europe and back. I was, in short, excited and apprehensive, thrilled and curious, all

together. None of which would serve as an excuse for adding to the length of this book, were it not that I believe that any reader who may have been interested in my Polish diary of 1920 may find the making of comparisons interesting.

*September 9th (Sunday).*—I find it difficult to believe—writing this in Warsaw—that only this morning I was shivering at Hendon. Our rather odd party consists of Storm Jameson, Bernard Newman, David Cleghorn-Thomson, Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, and I. And the most immediate analogy that springs to my mind is that of St. Teresa and her little brother setting out to convert the Moors! We flew in a Transport Command Dakota with an Australian crew and pilot—too cramped for my taste, with my general inclination towards claustrophobia, and my particular antipathy to all flying. But it was a wonderful clear day, with excellent conditions both for flight and vision. Route: The Naze, Haarlem, Hanover, Magdeburg, Berlin (the Gatow airport, where we landed to refuel), Warsaw. From roughly 1,500 feet Central Europe gave the impression of being largely uninhabited. In six and a half hours' flying I saw two trains under steam and three smoking factory chimneys. With fields and roads alike largely deserted the effect was unreal, queer, and frightening.

I was sorry not to see more of Berlin than the Gatow airport. Unreality was intensified by the sight of trim and civil German maid-servants, quite good cream-cakes, and the appearance out of the blue of Sidney Bernstein in battle-dress! As we went on we left the ruins of the centre of the capital away to our left, and I got no more than a fleeting impression of a brick-city built on the floor by a child, and kicked into its component parts by a careless grown-up boot.

Warsaw is just a shambles. What was the airport is simply a large field, surrounded by smashed buildings, and far too uneven—as a result of German mining—to make landing easy or agreeable. Driving into the city in the evening one saw every street the same: a *façade* of frontages, and then rubble. "Our own time ended in blood and broken bricks." Pathetic little shops, and booths, and stalls, and dug-outs interspersed among the ruins. Opposite the Polonia Hotel, where we are quartered (together with the British Embassy, the Czech Embassy, and other distinguished bodies such as U.N.R.R.A.), the ruin of what was once the Central Station looms up against the sky like a maniac's nightmare. Close beside it, marked out with very clean red and white flags, is one of the shrines set up in the various public places where the Germans did their punitive shootings. The hotel, I gather, survived simply because the Boches had used it as a headquarters. I am told there are 400,000 people now living in the city—twice as many as were here three months ago. One's first impression is of a great vitality—there is

none of the sulky apathy of the average London bus-queue—of universal shabbiness, but not of under-feeding. This last in great contrast to 1920. But the value of the *zloty*, and just how the average man and woman lives are alike a mystery. There was a good deal of bother about accommodation for us. After the various postponements of the expedition we do not appear to have been expected after all. But in due course rooms were found. David and I share what is almost a luxury bedroom, with what I imagine must be one of the very few working bathrooms in Warsaw. And an enthralling day was concluded by a magnificent dinner: vodka, caviare, schnitzel with fried eggs, and ice-cream! Which, according to the exchange rate quoted to me in London, would have worked out at about £10 a head. It was delicious. It must *not* be taken as typical of conditions. It seems that the hotel restaurant is not under the control of the management, but of the Russian Command, which supplies the food and takes the profits. One of the Poles in our party, who had also come from London, was horrified by the atmosphere—dancing, luxury food, and shabby, ill-conditioned young people. But human nature does not change. It is simply that in the Polonia as he knew it in the old days a different set of people had the money to spend—and had perhaps been brought up to spend it with rather better manners. . . .

10th (Monday).—Rose pretty early, and was a trifle stunned to be offered three eggs for breakfast as a matter of course. Spent most of the morning walking the streets, and seeking the addresses given to me by two Polish friends in London, who had asked me to deliver letters to their relatives. Both buildings when discovered were simply shells: whereabouts of their former inmates unknown. The general spectacle must be seen to be believed. Not a street but in London would be roped off by the police as being unsafe for traffic. Over three hundred people have been killed by falling walls alone during the last few weeks. Pavement barter is everywhere, giving a vast-scale impression of Petticoat Lane. But everywhere too there is this amazing vitality, cheerfulness, and busyness—symbolised by flower-stalls in profusion. Where they grow and who buys them is beyond me. The effect, in the midst of this abomination of desolation, is beyond words. I fancy, however, that a good deal of this gallantry attitude is skin-deep, arising from a conviction of standing on the edge of the world. A woman in the offices of the Red Cross said to me, fingering a worn black stuff dress, "We do our best to forget that many of us have only what we stand up in—and that the winter is not very far away." But I hope that people in other countries may remember both facts, and not confine their well-doing to the Germans for whom Mr. Gollancz seems so solicitous. In the same office Newman found a lady to whom he could give a letter from her

son, of whom she had heard nothing for two years ; did not know whether he was alive or dead. The expression on her fine worn face as she read the letter was moving beyond words. The general ruin is not, of course, due to the fighting in 1939, or the Insurrection of 1944, but to the deliberate gutting by fire of street after street by the Germans as a preliminary to their final evacuation. Imagination boggles at the thought of winter in this place, where there are no roofs, no heating, no telephones, no transport—except for converted farm-carts on which people cluster like flies, and man-propelled bath-chairs in which the fare sits in a sort of box in front of a pedalling cyclist. I got a glass of quite good beer for 35 *zloty*—about 2s.

Just before luncheon I was taken off to the new Polish Radio building by its sub-director : an agreeable, if ferocious-looking, little man wearing a major's uniform and a quantity of medals. He had only just learned to drive his motor-car, and made no bones about proving the fact by driving faster and more perilously than I had dreamed possible. The new studios, very elegant with rather *chic* red and white decoration, stood out like the proverbial mustard-plaster on a sack of coals. The Russians had helped with this re-building, as they had with the new transmitter at Rashyn, which had been put up in place of the one destroyed by the Germans in only three months. A good job of work. I was grateful to have had an excellent lunch—much vodka and a genuine *tournedos*—for the drive out to Rashyn was altogether hair-raising. The technicians at Rashyn were the first Red Army men I had met. They seemed very friendly—and very naive ; childish and rather touchingly proud of the work they had done, and of the technical equipment, most of which I gathered to have been looted from Silesia, perhaps from the Breslau Station which I visited back in 1933. There is a queer uniformity about their appearance. Nearly all look like rather shabby doubles of Marshal Zhukov. And the shabbiness is accentuated by the new gaudy epaulettes which imitate unsuccessfully what was the pride of the Tsarist uniform. Persisting evidence of deliberate destruction by the Germans is quite sickening. I asked why German prisoners were not being used for reconstruction. "Only Poles must rebuild the capital of Poland," was the reply. I fear I found its theatricality irresistible. The drive back ended in two breakdowns and a final stage in a jeep.

A self-styled "Independent Liberal" called, seeking Mrs. Chesterton at the hotel, and finding only me. While personally dim, he was not uninteresting. He expressed amazement at hearing on the one hand of Mr. Bevin's first speech as Foreign Secretary, which had not been printed here ; on the other of Aldous Huxley's living in California, which seemed to affect him unduly. It is not going to be easy to get at the real truth of things.

11th (Tuesday).—A day filled almost entirely with official engagements. In the morning we saw the Minister of Education and Culture—our official host ; an elderly man of charm, but with no foreign language, who reminded one irresistibly of Mr. Badger out of *The Wind in the Willows*. His office, like most of the Government offices, is in Praga, linked to Warsaw now by a single and temporary bridge, which hardly improves traffic conditions or the speed of official business. By a queer irony one of the least damaged buildings in Praga is the old Tsarist Garrison Church ! Other and more attractive things could have been better spared. We were bear-led by Christopher Radziwill, very lame after six months in Buchenwald. As an expropriated landlord working in with the present Government and the Russians, he is of course highly suspect to his own class. His self-justificatory reasons were proportionately emphatic and fluent. Judgment reserved. . . . Our appointment to see the Minister of Labour after luncheon was muddled, but a little later we interviewed Mikolaczyk, Vice-Premier and Minister of Agriculture, whose personal magnetism and charm were immediately apparent, and explain his acknowledged vast popularity with everyone except—so gossip has it—his colleagues in the Government. He spoke good English and was emphatic that live-stock and lorries were the country's greatest needs. Of the former only 20 per cent. survive in Poland. And he admitted by implication that the Russians are sweeping eastern Germany bare. Finally we were received by the President in the Belvedere, which like the Polonia has survived almost undamaged. He gave the impression of a tough man who knows his own mind, but not of any special breadth of view. He complained vigorously of the retention of Polish shipping by the Allied Pool, and insisted that all Poles abroad should come home. To which story, alas, there is more than one side.

It is pathetic the way in which perfect strangers slink rather furtively into the hotel to beg one to take letters to friends or relatives abroad. This dreadful uncertainty as to the fate of people last heard of in Russia, in Teheran, in Cairo, in Italy, in England, or in German prison-camps, broods over the whole country, like a horrible miasma. I must do what I can on my return to suggest to our European Service that in this direction there is a good humanitarian job to be done. I am amazed, and, of course, gratified by the quite terrific prestige of the B.B.C. as a result of its war-time activities. Newman insists that the sight of the Warsaw Ghetto outdoes anything in the way of ruin and destruction. It is true that I do not recall seeing a Jew in the streets to date. I gather that we go to Cracow to-morrow, and I confess that a change of background will not be without its points.

Our Ambassador gave us a pleasant and informal cocktail-party



in the evening, which was an agreeable prelude to a long and boring official dinner.

12th (*Thursday*).—The most irritating thing about this trip is the amount of time that is wasted in just hanging about. The good F., who was I believe originally responsible for our invitation, shows a more than typically Polish lack of sense of time. Every excuse must of course be made considering the general lack of all facilities in Warsaw. But F. imitates Mr. Micawber to an unreasonable degree, and we cannot very well disregard his arrangements. How many hours we have spent in the lounge of the Polonia Hotel—which reminds one of the beginning of a film crowd-scene most incompetently directed—I do not like to think. This morning we were all ready to go by half past nine in the morning. It was midday before the promised official cars appeared. It was after one before we could get packed in—very like sardines—and away.

We motored to Cracow by Radom and Kielce. The first part of the road—re-laid by the Germans—was excellent, and we made good time. But it worsened as we got into the foothills to the south. It is quite true that some of the Home Army are still under arms in the woods and mountains, carrying on a guerilla more or less effective against the Russians and the Polish militia. They attacked Radom only a days ago. We happened to run into the funeral procession of the killed militia-men. Apparently they opened the gaol and freed all political prisoners. Not long before Kielce was in their hands for several days. The confusion both of opinion and of facts is exemplified by the story told me that the Russians are deliberately keeping this guerilla alive in order to have an excuse for using the mailed fist at any time convenient to them. The car, in which happily I was not, broke a back axle, and the rest of the party did not get into Cracow until after I was in bed. It seemed altogether strange after Warsaw to drive into a city which looked normal, and see streets with glass in all the windows. I am again stabled with David, quite comfortably in the Francuzki Hotel, and find him a pleasant companion and a good campaigner. None of us, of course, compare with Newman, whose good temper, "insatiable curiosity," enthusiasm, and energy are quite wonderful. Nothing daunts him. He is determined to get into the Western Provinces and see something of the evictions, and I am sure he will get there. I'd much like to go with him, except that I must see what can be done for my relatives during these few days in Cracow. . . .

13th (*Thursday*).—The heart-rending experience of people coming in to enquire after and send messages to relatives is the same here as in Warsaw. On the other hand there is little or no visible damage. Prices are high, but the shops are well-stocked. I saw a vanload of potatoes upset in the street to-day, and no-one moved a hand to

pick one up ; not a child, not a beggar. One doubts any serious food-shortage. But clothes and fuel are a different story. None the less one's conscience rebels—while one's mouth waters—over meals so much better than anything I have had in England for some years : ham, eggs and fresh butter are placed without limit at our disposal.

To my aunt's flat in the morning. She, the two married daughters, their husbands, four children—three of them quite small—and an old mother-in-law, and two more of the girls are all in the flat. They seemed well, but have obviously had a bad time. The Germans billeted on them during the occupation were they said,, " very correct " but for a curious habit of announcing the fact loudly whenever they proposed to use the lavatory ! Gladys' husband, who was Potocki's agent at Lancut, was condemned both by the Germans and by the Russians, and was, I imagine, lucky to save himself. With care, in considerable discomfort I should judge, they are just getting by, pooling all their resources. But the point has been reached at which they just begin to sell things to live. With no rate of exchange fixed, the problem of how to be helpful is acute. Rena and her children were probably lucky to have got down from Wilro. But it took them nineteen days in a cattle-truck to do it. My aunt and the girls looked well, but worn. Of course, from their point of view the world is simply upside-down and inside-out. And one asks oneself gloomily if any possibility exists of adaptation to circumstances. . . .

In the evening to see the Ballet Parnell : a native ballet of surprising excellence. Vigour, colour, sound technique, with great gusto and attack. I specially liked Parnell himself, a tall lean man with a typically mobile actor's face, and a great talent for mime ; also a pretty dark girl called Nowakovna, with that sparkle and sense of comedy which distinguished Baronova in her early days. We had also visited a new Exhibition of modern Polish art, which was less remarkable for the pictures than for the fact that plenty of light and space was allowed to see them by. This was a long and tiring day.

14th (Friday).—Another exhausting day. Lunched *en famille* at Semiradskiego, where I felt that too much of the rations had been sacrificed in giving me a good meal, and my opinion of the grimish outlook for the future was confirmed. Met various old ladies, who confided their various woes with volubility and intensity. On the other hand it is fair to say that one felt that it would have been impossible for such " opposition " views to have been expressed aloud under the Gestapo. None the less it would be childish to pretend that the Russian occupation and influence are popular with any but an infinitesimal part of the population. I saw both N. and V. about whom I feel serious and definite concern. For neither of them, I am sure, is there any future in Poland. But exactly what to do so far

escapes me. . . . A second—and distressing—meeting with N. made me late in joining the rest of the party at the Theatre Groteska, where a solo dancer was giving an exhibition performance. We were given a warm public welcome by the Director from the stage, and under the influence of a spasm of emotional enthusiasm took it upon myself to get up and reply. I hope, and think, that the warmth of the reception given to my speech justified its exhibitionism. We walked into some mild shooting on our way across the park back to the hotel—some militia firing, mostly in the air, at a couple of Russian looters. It is definitely not very safe in the streets late at night. N. told me of two girls who, a few nights ago were stripped to their stockings. Any violence is invariably motivated by acquisitiveness, especially for wrist-watches. There are no civil police. The militia lack discipline, and look like armed corner-boys. If they have officers, the latter wear no insignia. And the Russians shoot and loot quite casually and without malice, rather like schoolboys who have been given weapons, brought from the depths of the country and made free of Woolworth's. More shooting in the small hours spoiled my night's sleep.

15th (Saturday).—I am a little ashamed to confess that this morning I shirked seeing a horror-film of the Oswiecim camp, leaving that experience to David and Storm, while I went to see the Parnell Ballet rehearse. But the theatre remains the theatre all the world over, and nothing had begun by the time I had to leave. So to the Town Hall to receive our official invitation to the Council Dinner for to-night. After lunch the indefatigable Dobrolowski—who of all the people responsible for our well-being has shown senses of punctuality and practicality—took us out by car to the Municipal Park and the Polish Whipsnade. All the beasts, save only the bears, looked well-fed and in good condition. Saw in particular one fine specimen of the almost extinct European bison. We were escorted round by a shabby and elderly forest-guard, who, on hearing that I was connected with the British Radio, took off his cap, and told us how he had listened to the B.B.C. Polish Service throughout the war in his hut there among his beasts. He expressed the purest sentiments of Liberal individualism, and some disappointment—pointing to his trousers—with the slowness of the arrival of help from UNRRA. I find everywhere a touching and pathetic continuing belief that England can be relied upon for assistance. He accepted cigarettes when we left, but would take no money-tip for doing his job for the benefit of distinguished foreigners! A delightful character.

Our entertainment at dinner by the Cracow City Council was slightly marred for me by having to make a speech, and that after talking French all through the evening to the Vice-President of the

Council who was most amiable but spoke no English. After six years of disuse my own never particularly strong command of the language is inadequately described as rusty. . . .

16th (Sunday).—All day spent on the return journey to Warsaw. We lunched at Kielce, where I forgot my one and only hat! Then, half-way to Radom, the car broke down beyond remedy. We were lucky enough to get ourselves picked up by a Red Army lorry, which—in the intervals of breaking down itself—took us the rest of the way. The soldiers were friendly and boyish, looking upon the whole thing as a huge joke. When repairs had to be done the officers retired behind an adjacent tree to eat sausage and drink vodka, while one Andrei—who wore carpet slippers with his uniform and alone seemed to understand the working of the lorry, which was Russian-made—affected essential repairs. The efforts of the rest of the soldiery seemed confined for the most part to beating any movable parts with iron bars to see if they were all right. We got back to the Polonia—and to more trouble about accommodation—cold and weary not much before ten at night. We and our baggage had been conveyed free, with the expression of much goodwill. But I noticed that various peasants and soldiers who had also been picked up *en route* were mulcted of three hundred or so *zloty* as a fare. . . .

17th (Monday).—Went down early to the Old Town to see the hideous ruin of the Ghetto; about a mile square of mounded rubble, with an occasional broken tooth of masonry to emphasise the completeness of the destruction. The breached and broken wall which the Jews were compelled to build round themselves, and behind which they fought the Germans *for two months* in 1941, stands as their imperishable monument. After this horror even the shattering and desecration of the Polish Unknown Soldier's Tomb—which once lay in such peace and dignity beneath its little colonnade against the quiet and lovely background of the flowers in the Saxon Gardens—seemed comparatively a small thing. Though to see the shabby women kneeling beside the cracked stone, and laying their pitiful little bunches of flowers at the foot of the broken columns took one by the throat.

Bernard Newman is back from the Western Provinces, after a remarkable trip, which included a painful interview with a Russian General to whom N. complained after the best British tradition because some Red soldiers had looted a peasant's last horse. The General first explained that his men were "primitive." Newman found this inadequate and remarked that on his return to England "he would write a book that would stir the conscience of mankind." The General finished gulping vodka out of a tumbler and replied with a good-natured smile, "My dear Mr. Newman, there is no such thing." Regretfully I feel the last laugh and word was with Muscovy.

N. had also seen the evictions of Germans from Silesia, and found them being done with consideration and efficiency, but none the less painful for that. The insanity of political activity in general seems typified when Poles from Lwow are put into more comfortable German Silesian homes, and complain that "these are other people's homes—we would prefer our own homes in Lwow." The Polish militia admit to looting the evicted persons of their wretched bundles of belongings, and justify themselves on the ground that if they do not do so, the Russians will. N. also saw, in Kattowice, open trucks standing in sidings in the rain, crammed with such loot as typewriters and adding-machines. This at a time when lack of transport is a matter to Poland of life and death. I admire Newman immensely. He is rather like an immensely genial Priestley, gets on with everybody, misses nothing, and is more than shrewd. He is the pick of our bunch, being, I fancy, less emotionally affected by what he sees. So much in the way of misery and ruin is beginning, or so it seems to me, to get Storm down. . . .

We were taken in the afternoon to see the Polski Theatre in the process of active rebuilding. That a theatre should have been chosen out of such a superfluity of targets is typical both of Poland and of the spirit in Warsaw. It was with a queer mixture of horror and satisfaction that one stood in the box which had been used by Franck while Governor of Warsaw. . . .

18th (*Tuesday*).—Spent most of to-day with the Polish Radio people, working on two talks: one live for the Polish Home Service; the other for recording in England, and subsequent use on our European service. I was also glad to find B.'s parents, who were alive and living in reasonable comfort. I had feared the worst on their account. I got back rather late, owing to a muddle over car transport. There was rather more than the usual volume of shooting in the streets, a Sten or its equivalent opening up outside the Polonia with spasmodic bursts. . . .

19th (*Wednesday*).—A medley of farewells, delays, alarums, and excursions. Left the Warsaw airfield about four in the afternoon, and into Gatow rather late—too late to get into Berlin as I had hoped to do. The R.A.F. people said that the roads were simply not safe after dark. They were all very pleasant and provided us with a warming variety of drinks in the mess. But I gather that we are really rather a nuisance as they are pressed for accommodation owing to a "Monty" conference called for to-morrow. Slept differently. I am apprehensive of to-morrow's weather.

20th (*Thursday*).—We only got off at eleven. Then over Germany, flying above the indescribable beauty of the cloud-ceiling, we were in bright sunshine, and the plane might have been a Rolls on a good road. We dropped down as we approached the Dutch coast, as if to

take a look at Arnhem and Walcheren, and so homeward-bound. The first sight of England coincided with a mild storm of wind and rain, and I found the last twenty minutes of the journey purgatorial. I am always nervous in the air. On this occasion I was frightened to death. I doubt if I have ever experienced such relief as when we finally touched down at Croydon. However Adam was there to meet me, R. had sent a wire, and the Polish Embassy a car, and I swiftly relaxed and subscribed to the platitudinous sentiment that there is no place like home. Not that I would have missed a moment of the trip for anything in the world. . . .

So much for the extracts from my Diary, which have only been deprived of references to various family matters. My conclusions are clearly too superficial to be of any real or permanent value, except that they were those of a private individual, in the service neither of a state nor of a newspaper : of one of the first private Englishmen who had the opportunity to see what had been made of Poland by the Second German War. To the Government which gave me the opportunity, and to the companions who did so much to make of the trip such an agreeable experience, my gratitude is due. Does it imply a lamentable failure of imagination to admit that I needed this experience to convince me finally that, if there is to be any future, whether for Poland or for the Civilised World, neither gratitude nor patriotism, nor expediency, is enough ?



## ENVOI

As I reread these pages I am conscious principally of people and happenings which I have not mentioned: of omissions due either to uncertain memory, or to the vetoes of discretion and—I hope—good taste. I have succeeded neither in writing a history of broadcasting, nor in painting my own portrait. I can only comfort myself—after the fashion of James Branch Cabell's "Manuel"—with the reflection that "I have followed after my own thinking and my own desire. And if that begets loneliness, I must endure it." Experience of the locust-eaten years between the German war deserves, and will no doubt obtain more detailed and more expert chronicling. But what I have maintained as true for the artist, is true also for the professional broadcaster. He must be aware of the world outside. He cannot hope to live in it. The daily worker, when he knocks-off, clocks-out, or picks up umbrella and bowler-hat, can look forward to forgetting the circumstances of his daily round. The broadcasting producer can forget them only in his dreams. And if he does so, he is lucky. If his routine of desk-work and meetings is not succeeded by work on a studio floor, his so-called leisure will be qualified—in theatre or cinema—by the curiosity of the talent-spotter, the critical awareness of one producer watching the results of the work of another. At parties he will be asked questions about broadcasting, by questioners for the most part ill-informed, and frequently malicious. At week-ends he will be mistaken for a qualified radio engineer, and invited "to mend the set" or "to get Tokyo." His breakfast post will contain requests for auditions. His domestic telephone places him at the mercy of total strangers, combining careerism with a thick skin. His hours are perforce irregular. His habits often convey an equivalent impression. He is the journalist of the entertainment world; on the air to-night and gone to-morrow. He may be savagely attacked in the columns of the press, or on the floor of the House of Commons—I have suffered both experiences—and yet have no right of nor opportunity to reply, though the charge be irrelevant, gratuitous, or simply untrue. To the actor or author he is an unsympathetic bureaucrat. To the civil servant he is an artist, tainted by bohemian privilege. To the programme planner he seems frequently a public danger; to the engineer invariably a private nuisance.

Yet he cannot be unhappy. He simply has not the time. Programme items already scheduled six weeks ahead approach with the remorseless certainty of the grinding of the mills of God. And as the red light of each transmission flickers and dies, the producer's sole reaction is to exchange a marked and grimy script for the clean and



virgin pages of his next assignment. The compensations are considerable—but of these I have written elsewhere. Chief among them, I fancy, is the belief that it is exciting to have even the little finger of control over a flash of lightning that can speak.

Yet I could have wished to have described more fully some of the aspects of the world between the wars if only for my own benefit in the future. For I believe that those years are as dead as the carnival years that preceded 1914. And, for all their dismal squalor, their fear-ridden wishful-thinking, their self-seeking, self-advertisement, and vulgarity, they have, if little importance in history, none the less their sentimental values in a personal record. I should have liked to have written in detail of the north-east coast town I saw long ago on a theatrical tour, dying by inches under the stranglehold of unemployment ; of de Basil's restoration to London of Russian Ballet, and especially of Baronova as the little milliner of *Beau Danube*—the gayest thing I ever saw ; of a harvest-festival in Hungary, where the old pagan rites persisted in the man dressed as a bear and led in chains as a scapegoat, and the peasants sang the melancholy song of their lost lands, while the tears ran down their dusty cheeks in the sunshine ; of friends who have talked with me until the sun rose over Covent Garden, or danced with me and walked home along the Embankment under the moon ; of the three "jeeps" (Junior Programme Engineers) who once helped me shift the essentials of a production from the top-floor studio of Broadcasting House to its sub-basement in twenty minutes following an air-raid warning, and so kept a show on the air ; of Ed Murrow, gravely and quietly prophesying the French collapse in 1940 a full fortnight before anyone else I knew so much as believed it possible ; of Constance Cummings broadcasting *St. Joan* without a script ; of Sir John Reith playing "the broker's man" in my amateur production of *Tilly of Bloomsbury* ; of listening to the Dunkirk guns from the downs above Eastbourne ; of Carol Goodner's "Masha" which might have been a Manet come to enchanting life ; of my brother John's "Noah" and "Hamlet" at the New Theatre ; and, above all else, "of the laughter and the love of friends. . . ."

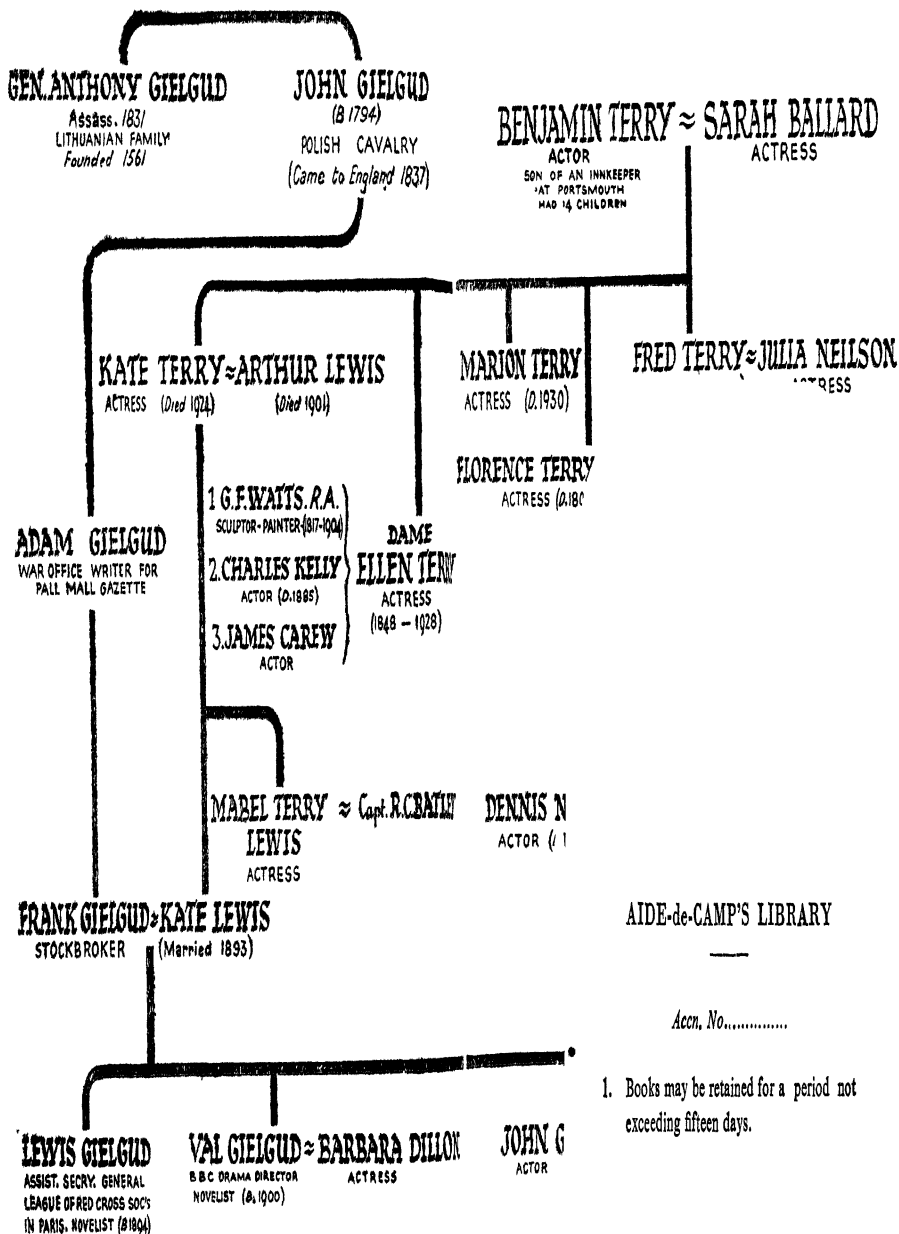
In these last at any rate we can believe, and by them we can hold, until and even if the world cracks over our heads.

June 20th, 1945.

London.



# IT'S IN THE FAMILY



## AIDE-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

Accn. No.....

- Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days.

